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OLD HARD HEAD; or, WHIRLWIND AND HIS MILK-WHITE MARE.

A TALE OF THE KIOWAY COUNTRY.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,

AUTHOR OF "THE GENTLEMAN FROM PIKE," "A MAN OF NERVE," "ALWAYS ON HAND," "TIGER DICK, THE FARGO KING," ETC., ETC.



"LOOK A-HYER, BOY—TAKE AN OLE MAN'S ADVICE, LET SQUAWS ALONE!—LET 'EM ALONE! THEY'RE BAD MEDICINE."

Old Hard Head;

OR,

Whirlwind and His Milk-white Mare.

A Tale Of the Kioway Country.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,

AUTHOR OF "TIGER DICK," "THE GENTLEMAN FROM PIKE," "A MAN OF NERVE," "ALWAYS ON HAND," "A HARD CROWD,"

"DESPARD, THE DUELIST," "CAPTAIN MASK," "CAPTAIN

ARIZONA," "PATENT-

LEATHER JOE,"

ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE KIOWAY PRINCESS.

A NARROW, irregular ledge, between cragged and pine-spiked mountain and sheer precipice.

"Whew!"—a shrill whistle.

A hare rises on its haunches, with ears erect, muzzle quivering, and black, bead-like eyes twinkling.

"Twang!"—and the innocent little creature is transfixed by a red-feathered arrow.

With an ejaculation of triumph, an Indian girl springs into view.

Her fringed and beaded dress is of white fawn-skin; a necklace of beads lies in a broad festoon on her breast; bands of virgin gold clasp her bare arms just below the shoulder, and broad hoops of the same metal depend from her ears; the part in her hair is stained red, and two long eagle-feathers trail gracefully over her flowing tresses.

But her hair is neither straight nor coarse; and about many a camp-fire between the Platte and the Rio Grande they will tell you that, in one of his many forays into Chihuahua, the fierce Red Wolf must have snatched her, an infant, from some ill-starred hacienda, leaving the bones of her murdered parents to calcine in the smoldering ruins.

Now she sprung forward, intent only on securing her quarry, to be checked by a deep, ominous growl, as round an angle of the rocks appeared a huge bear, the most formidable of his species, the dreaded cinnamon.

With a shriek of alarm, Waving Plume sprung to the verge of the precipice, the only way of escape from those terrible claws.

While she hovered on the brink, giddy with horror, a ringing cry came from above; and from the crag that overhung the ledge dropped between her and her dread foe an Indian youth of noble proportions.

"Away! away! Run down the ledge!" he cried, in the Kioway dialect, yet with an accent which showed that it was not his native tongue.

"And leave you to fight alone? Am I so base?" returned the girl, drawing a knife from her girdle.

Her gallant defender had not time to urge the fight she scorned. The bear had risen on its hind legs, and now menaced him with a deadly embrace.

In the act of leaping the youth had swung his blanket so that it fell upon and enveloped the head of the monster, to be torn to shreds by one sweep of his claw-armed paws. But in that one blindfold moment the active assailant twice plunged a keen hunting-knife hilt-deep into the side of the brute, just behind the shoulder.

A scream of pain and fury issued from the yawning jaws; they closed upon the forearm of the daring youth; the paws embraced him, their long claws lacerating his back, and man and beast went to the ground together.

With a cry which fear and rage swelled to a note of wild music, Waving Plume sprung upon the king of the mountain, seized one ear, and drove her knife through an eye to the brain.

But the blow was needless. Already the heart of the monster was cleft in twain, to spill its red treasure at every pulse. After the death-struggle, in which he cruelly tore and crushed his slayer, old bruin gasped his last.

The Indian princess now took the head of her insensible rescuer in her lap, gazing into his still face with fear-dilated eyes; and over the verge of the cliff, like a black cloud of menace, appeared a dusk face, distorted into lines of fiendish rage!

A moment the glaring eyes darted their jealous lightnings, noting the heroic contour of that body, denuded of its blanket covering, naked to the waist, the muscles lying fold on fold, compact and hard, beneath a fine, smooth envelope of gold-bronze skin. Then, as the youth showed signs of returning consciousness, the face was withdrawn.

The dark eyes opened. The first frown of pain lapsed into a smile of undisguised admiration. The rogue never moved, to release the maiden from the unfair advantage her pity had given him.

"Ah, Light of the Morning! no cloud has dimmed your brightness?"

"No, I am not hurt. But you—"

"I gaze upon Waving Plume!—all else is forgotten."

"You know me, then? But you? What young chief—"

"Alas! no chief am I!"

"But your sire?"

"A thousand times have I asked the winds that question. They are dumb!"

His face darkened with melancholy and wrath.

"What! is there none to tell you of him?"

Her looks and tones showed quick sympathy, as well as surprise.

"The accursed white man hurried him upon the trail of death when I was but a creeping pappoose. Old Hard Head, a great hunter, who saved my life, has taught me to use the rifle and revolver of his people, as well as the knife and tomahawk of my own, that my revenge may be the more swift and sure. Ah! why do I delay?"

And as if stung by a sense of shame at dalliance there in the lap of love while the blood of his father called him to action, he started to his feet.

The maiden also rose, her eye kindling with admiration as she noted his commanding presence, young as he was.

"Of what tribe are you? Your speech betrays that you are not a Kioway."

"I am a Delaware!"

And he drew himself proudly erect.

But see! the maiden starts with an involuntary ejaculation; and an icy hauteur blights the opening blossoms of tenderness.

"Ah! what is this?" he cries, starting forward in dismay.

A dainty hand repels him.

"The daughter of Red Wolf owes the Delaware her life—"

Tone and manner tell him that his love is threatened by one of those feuds common among all races of uncivilized men.

He hastens to interrupt her, pride blending with his rather sad reproach:

"If you remember that with pain, repay me, that we may be quits. Give me the name you asked for a moment ago—that happy moment before the cloud came between our hearts! A name from the lips of Waving Plume must make a great brave of even the despised Delaware! Give it, and I will make crag and canyon ring with it until even your scorn relents."

"Let it be Whirlwind. Your terrible battle has earned the name," she replied, in a somewhat softened tone.

As if to make still further amends, she volunteered to make him, as a trophy, a necklace of the bear's claws, cutting a strip from her fawn-skin dress, on which to string them, when he had drilled them with the point of his hunting-knife.

All a-tremble with ecstasy, he knelt to receive this amulet of love, declaring that no enemy's weapon could reach his life while he wore the charm her fingers had made.

When, after a haughty leave-taking, she had disappeared, a wave of emotion swept over him. His lips blanched; his eyes flashed; his form dilated; his hands clinched; his muscles became rigid; with intense bitterness he cried:

"A Delaware!—a despised Delaware! No! no! they are lying gods that tell us we must sit in the wigwam with squaws and papposes, while men daub their faces with paint and bound like the roe along the war-path! They do not speak to me. I cannot hear their voices. They are weak, like the piping cry of a pappoose that has just opened its eyes to the light. I will hearken to no god who does not speak in the bellowing thunder—the god of great chiefs whose commands can be heard above the din of battle!"

"Then I shall be fit to mate with Waving

Plume; then she will no longer despise the Delaware!"

Thus far he had lived the life of a care-free boy. To fish, to hunt, to trap; to ride at break-neck pace on his fractious little bronco, whooping at the top of his voice; to leap the crags like a mountain goat; to dive and swim like an otter—these had been the sports of a rattle-brained young savage. But all in a twinkling love had transformed the boy into a man. To be worthy of this fair young princess he must do deeds of valor.

With a new firmness and decision in all his movements, he proceeded to skin the bear; and as he bent over the carcass, his back presenting a fair target, up on the cliff a Kioway brave, with a face inflamed by jealous passion to demoniac ferocity, fitted an arrow to his bow, and drew it back to the very head!

CHAPTER II.

SANTA FE BOB.

TABALARPA, province of Chihuahua, Mexico!

A ramshackle cart, its wheels mere disks cut from a tree trunk, its oxen yoked by a beam across their horns, its axles shrieking and groaning for grease.

A line of burros, donkeys scarcely bigger than goats, each tied to the tail of his fellow next in advance, each staggering beneath a couple of casks (either of which outweighs himself) slung across his back, the leader nearly crushed by the added burden of a lazy Mexican, mounted contentedly between the casks, swearing and belaboring his meek jade between naps.

Here a modern Rebecca, a descendant of the Incas, if noble bearing is any sign of pedigree, dark-skinned, black-eyed, with heavy braids of long, purple-black hair, and—oh, shade of Mrs. Grundy!—a single garment, a mere slip of hempen cloth, balances an *aja* or earthen jar of water on her head. Before her sports a morsel of nut-brown humanity, clothed only with innocence and a breechcloth!

Yonder a dozen men walk in single file, uttering weird cries and scourging their naked backs and limbs until the blood trickles copiously, the fires of frenzy in their eyes and their ghastly faces made more wild by white fillets tied about their heads—priests who have grafted the harshest rites of the Church of Rome upon the savage old Aztec religion.

Lounging in every attitude of utter laziness and worthlessness, sundry specimens of the Simon-pure "Greaser," with no visible business in life but to pull at *cigarettos*; and on every hand a multiplicity of dogs and children, playing and wrangling by turns.

Out of keeping with this scene a man in the dress and armament of a Knight of the Plains, with hair flowing to his shoulders, and mustached lip curling with contempt of this degenerate race.

The child clung to its mother's dress in fear; the mother rested her hand on her child's head, as if to protect it, crossed herself and breathed the name of the Madonna, while the *Americano* passed.

Kicking open the door, Santa Fe Bob entered an adobe house with the swagger of a man who tramples under foot the rights of those who dare not oppose his will.

Within the low-ceiled room, murky with tobacco-smoke, were a score or more of Mexicans, the lucky gambling, the unlucky anathematizing the ill-fortune that shut them out from the coveted delights.

On the entrance of Santa Fe Bob, a hush fell. All eyes dropped, cowed, before his challenging glance. In their hearts they cursed the hated *Americano* with execrations their lips dared not utter.

"Hello, Tony, you cigarette-smoking side of bacon!—trot out yer fire-water," he shouted, pushing his hat on the back of his head. "Ain't there ary gent hyer to drink with me?"

And, after a contemptuous glance around:

"Not one side of one!"

"*Excellenza, a service de V!*" said the bartender, servilely, hastening to offer him a glass of mescal, the native beverage.

Santa Fe Bob tossed off the liquor at a gulp.

"Vile stuff!—fit to poison a white man!" he growled. "No wonder you Greasers air sich white livered cusses. But that's neither hyer nor thar. I say, is Sam, the Sockdoliger, puttin' up at your shebang?"

"*Sí, señor*; I have zat distinguished honor," replied Antonio.

"Honor!—that rooster!" scoffed Bob. "Waal, how d'ye find the way about this old owl-burrow, anyway?"

"*Excellenza* vill precede me," said the Mexican, Antonio, opening a door, and about to step back deferentially to let his guest go before.

"Precede you?" repeated Santa Fe Bob, disdainfully. "Bet your sweet life! I'm a white man. I am!"

And seizing his host by the collar, he whirled him out of the way and marched through the door.

It gave into an open space or court-yard, out of which he opened several other doors to various apartments.

"I'll rouse the snoozer!" pursued the blustering braggart; and pounding with fist and foot a thundering summons on each door in succession, until they shook and rattled again, he shouted:

"Wide awake hyer!—wide awake, I say!"

From one of the rooms came a suppressed scream, then a woman's agitated voice said:

"Patience, *Senor Americano*!—one little moment!"

"Whoop!" yelled Santa Fe Bob, at the top of his voice. "Out you come, or I'll pull your old rat-trap down about your ears!"

And he shook the door until it seemed as if it would fall to pieces.

"Ah! *Madonna Santissima*!" murmured Antonio, following his unmanageable guest, all a-tremble. "The barbarian will not leave one adobe upon another!"

From the gloomy saloon, as from a cavern, eyes that glowed like living coals glared out, but no voice was raised in protest.

Presently the door was opened by a woman of the Yaqui Indians, with an admixture of Spanish blood, and perhaps a quartering from the white barbarians of the North. They have all sorts of crosses in the northern provinces of Mexico.

"Hey, my beauty!" cried Santa Fe Bob, chucking her under the chin, "have you got the Sockdoliger in—Hallo! thar's the old stoughton-bottle! Turn out hyer, pardner! Waal, I'm blowed if the cuss hain't gone to roost with his boots on! Hal ha! ha!"

In one corner of the room, on a miserable shake-down on the floor, unworthy the name of a bed, lay a man, but half undressed, in a drunken stupor.

"Hallo, you thunderin' lunk-head, this is no time for sleep!" shouted Santa Fe Bob, uncere- moniously dragging the inebriate out on the floor.

"Le' m' lone! Go th' dev'l!" mumbled Sockdoliger Sam, ending with a snore.

"Come, brace up! You infernal fool, I've got work for ye!"

But the roughest handling produced no effect.

However, Santa Fe Bob was fertile of resource.

Dragging the drunkard out into the patio, he took up a jar of water which stood at hand, and, holding it as high as his head, proceeded to pour its contents upon the head of his friend, while Antonio crossed himself and apostrophized the Virgin, and Chico, the Yaqui woman, trembled with fear and murmured her sympathy for the man so harshly used.

The improvised douch had the desired effect. Sam, the Sockdoliger, sputtered and gasped and strangled, and finally came to himself sufficiently to scramble to his feet and glare about, clutching at his waist for his bowie-knife. But his belt had been laid aside, so that he was unarmed, save with the brawny weapons Nature had supplied him. Blind with rage, he proceeded to use these at once, anathematizing a supposed Greaser, as he lunged at Santa Fe Bob.

That worthy deftly caught his wrist, and giving his arm a twist that still further brought him to his senses, said coolly:

"Cheese it, cully!—you've got the ole man in yer wool!"

"Eh! who the devil are you?" demanded Sam, the Sockdoliger, brushing the hair out of his eyes.

"I'm the high-cockalorum of this hyer town and surroundin' country! Ye hyear me, pardner! Come, Sam, straighten up. I've got a job that's jest rotten with pay-dirt. Thar's millions in it, pardner. Jest git yer legs under ye."

"Oh! is that you, Bob? What in Cain air ye tryin' to git through ye? You're blasted fresh, seems to me."

"That's all right, Sam," said his friend.

"After we git the swell out o' your head we'll talk it all over."

"Hyer, you — Greasers! Fetch on some more water!"

This command Antonio obeyed with precipitation, while Chico fled in terror.

Sockdoliger Sam, at last made to understand that there was work to be done, of his own accord soused his head thoroughly in cold water, until the effects of his debauch were neutralized.

Then, having dressed, he took a single glass of liquor to steady his nerves, and was himself again.

Headless of the scowls they left behind, these representatives of a superior race left Antonio's "dive."

"What's in the keerds, Bob?" asked Sam, the Sockdoliger, now looking what he was—every inch a "fighting man."

"Waal, say three noughts fur you."

"What?"

"A thousand dollars."

"Shol! That must be red money."

Another name for "blood-money."

"I should smile!" admitted Santa Fe Bob. "That don't turn your stomach—does it?"

"Turn nothin'! But whar the deuce did you drop onto such a job?"

"Whar does a feller drop onto anything!" asked Santa Fe Bob, loftily. "I tell yer, pard, I lay awake nights, an' figur' these things out. That's what ye may call genius—hey?"

"Wind!" was the laconic amendment.

"That's all right"—taking no offense. "But as soon as we strike Paddy Magee I'll open up, an' then you'll see what kind of wind it is."

"Won't there be a crowd, Bob? Too many only stands in one another's way, besides cuttin' down the divy."

"I'm runnin' this consarn, ye onderstand. Paddy Magee, I say, and Paddy Magee it is!"

"Suit yourself, Bob—you're the doctor."

"You bet! That's a leetle thing I almost always do. But hyer we go! They're kickin' up the devil's own row, ain't they?"

As he spoke he led the way into another adobe house, as unconcerned as he had entered Antonio's.

Here a fandango was "in full blast."

In Mexico the one essential for a dance is a fiddle. All the other elements can be found at a moment's notice, any hour in the twenty-four, "lying around loose."

Men of all shades of complexion and style of dress were "tripping the light fantastic" with bodiced and slippered senoras, some young, some old, some blooming, some faded, but all moving with a grace peculiar to daughters of the tropics.

Of the men, one was performing an unmistakable Irish jig, to his own evident satisfaction, regardless of the covert sneers of the "blaggard Gr'asers—divil swape the h'athins!"

"Hey, hyer! Paddy—Paddy Magee!" shouted Santa Fe Bob.

"Good luck till yez, Bob!" cried back the Irishman, cheerily. "Come in an' show these spalpeens how they shake fut at a Christian shindy."

And dashing his hat on the floor, spitting on his hands and slapping his thighs, while he yelled at the top of his voice in excess of enjoyment, Paddy Magee abandoned himself to the wildest antics cultivated by Terpsichore on the "r'al owld sod."

"Whoop, ye divils!—bi, ye murtherin' gos-soons!—how d'yez loike that, I dunno? Now yez hov ut! A-yah!—a-yah!—St. Patrick's day in the mahrning!"

In his enthusiasm he advanced upon the Mexicans, in a way that made them scatter out of the way of his flying brogans, while one hand rested on his hip, and in the other he brandished an imaginary shillaly.

"Cheese it, you dog-goned rattlehead!" laughed Santa Fe Bob; and with that rough pleasantry which rude men tolerate from their friends, he strode into the midst of the dancers, seized Paddy Magee's not over-delicate ear, whirled him with his face toward the door, and administered a vigorous kick in the rear, with the terse command:

"Git!"

Once more in the street, he explained the situation as they went along. Evidently he knew his men; for he took it for granted that they were ready for any bloody work he laid out for them.

Ten minutes later he was presenting them to a cheery-faced young Englishman, evidently just from the mother country.

"These hyer, Mr. Annesley, air the boys that'll pull you through. Each of 'em is good for his weight in wild-cats."

There was not a shade of distrust on Sir Walter Annesley's face, as he said, smilingly:

"They look like stout fellows; and that's what we want; for there may be some hard knocks before us. No doubt we shall get on handsomely. I'm new to your country, my man; but I've dropped my tiger in India, and had more than one brush with bushmen in Australia; so I think you may count on my not being the first to flunk, if the Kioways and Apaches make it lively for us."

"As soon as everything can be got in readiness," to Santa Fe Bob, "we'll start. I dislike to leave Humphrey; but, as you say, we've no time to lose."

"You have to take Injuns like fair weather," said Santa Fe Bob. "They may raise an' play the very devil any day. We can strike tent to-morrer, ef you say so, Cap."

"To-morrow let it be then."

And on the morrow, leaving his faithful servant, Humphrey, with a leg broken by the kick of a mule, Sir Walter set out for New Mexico, with his three treacherous guides.

Would he live to execute the mission that took him to that wild country? How could he escape secret as well as open foes?

After days of weary pilgrim-age, they found themselves on the *Llano Estacado*, that arid desert whose highway is marked by the bleached bones of animals and man, who escaped fierce Kioway and Apache only to fall victims to thirst and famine and the intolerable heat of a sun of molten iron in a sky of burnished brass.

All day, and even into the night, they had pushed forward, in search of water for their fainting animals, until one of the two pack-mules stopped, and when urged, emphasized his determination to go no further by lying down.

All were but too glad to rest; and they camped on the spot, without careful examination of their surroundings.

From the deep sleep that fell upon him as soon as his head touched the ground, Sir Walter Annesley was roused by the explosion of firearms within a few feet of his head. Had his treacherous guides chosen that time and place to assassinate him?

CHAPTER III.

OLD HARD HEAD.

He was a weather-beaten old Sylvanus, with his rugged face bronzed to the color of mahogany, and the snows of many winters in his unkempt tangle of grizzly hair and beard. His dress was of buckskin, black and shiny with long use.

He stood on the border of a beaver dam. At his feet lay a dead beaver, at which sniffed a dog whose ears and muzzle betrayed that wolf-cross common among Indian curs.

"Ah-h!" sighed Old Hard Head, with a foreboding shake of the head, "thar won't be no hole nur corner in the univarse, hymeby, whar an honest man kin git a leetle quiet elbow-room. This hyer country's gittin' crowded—it's gittin' crowded! Pelts is scurser an' scurser, an' a heap littler'n they was"—with a disatisfied glance at the beaver last removed from the trap.

"Dash the gold!—that's what I say. The Lord has put 'nough above ground for honest folks. Tany rate, the Injuns has run this hyer country a purty consider'ble spell 'thout rootin' an' rammin' around fur what nobody can't eat nur w'ar. It's goin' clean ag'in' natur—that's what it is. An' jist look at the scallawags what gits it!—a-cuttin' an' shootin' an' carousin', an' raisin' Old Ned ginerally. It slips through their fingers like a greased pig's ear, 'thout doin' them nur nobody no good. Dash my boreal blizzards, ef everything ain't goin' to everlastin' smash!"

"Tain't fur me to turn ag'in' my own color," he continued, resuming his tramp, after having reset his trap, "though I reckon it 'ud be a God's marcy to rid the airth o' sich varmints, jist like they was tarant'lars an' snakes! But the boy's got red blood, an' red gifts, an' a powerful long red score to rub out; an' I allow he's got the right to cut 'em up, root an' branch. An' dash my two eyes into one ef I raise a finger ag'in' it! The good book says, som'ers—'An eye fur an eye, an' a tooth fur a tooth!' That's Bible fur 't, along o' natur; an' I reckon that'll stan' the law— Eh!"

For his dog had crouched to the ground with a scarcely audible whimper.

On the limb of a tree, gazing intently at something below it he discovered a wolverine.

At that moment, from behind an intervening copse, came the light patter of dainty footsteps; the beast of prey swooped from its perch; then followed sounds of a fierce struggle, a woman's piercing shriek, an animal's cry of pain and terror; a snap shot; then a dark body crashed through the barrier of foliage.

A rush, and the fangs of the dog met in the carcass of a dead wolverine.

From behind the coppice appeared the stately antlers of a stag, as the graceful animal made one royal bound through the air, to fall in a heap, evidently mortally wounded; then with aringing shout of triumph, as musical as a chime of silver bells, another figure leaped into view—a veritable Diana, who sprang upon the quarry, drew back the pronged horns, and plunged a knife into the white throat.

"Dash it!" cried the astonished hunter, stopping short in amazement.

His eyes shone as round and bright as new dollars! Age had not dimmed their keenness for the charms of a beautiful woman, whom he held second only to a fine horse.

As for the fair huntress, having leaped back to escape injury, as the dying animal half-struggled to its feet, its tongue lolling, its eyes distended and glassy, she faced the possible rival claimant in an attitude of defiance, crying in the Kioway tongue:

"It is mine! I shot at it first. And see! my arrow is in its heart."

"That's jest as you say, marm, bein's as I didn't so much as p'int at the critter. An' this hyer's yourn, too; the which it's got your arrier stickin' into its pelt along o' t'other. An' finer shots I never see, marm, nur a harnsomer gal to the back of 'em! Soak my socks in cedar sap if thar's ary lie in that!"

And with all the deference, if not grace, of a young gallant, the veteran brought forward the wolverine, which the maiden had indeed pierced with an arrow at the moment when she screamed to frighten it from its prey.

"An' look hyer, my beauty! between you an' me an' the fence post, I've been lookin' out fur a squaw put together jest about in the shape that you be, this dog's age. I've got a dug-out over yander that'll jest knock the socks off of ary Injun wickee-up you ever see. An' we don't feed on moldy pemmican thar, nuther, but everything in its season; an' we bunk in clover—you hyer me? An' ef so be you'll tie to the ole man—eh? Kee!"

And favoring his would-be Juliet with a prodigious wink and an amatory poke in the ribs with his forefinger, this ancient Romeo burst forth into a roaring:

"Haw! haw! haw! haw!"

With an intense cry of disgust the girl leaped back, raising her knife menacingly, and crying:

"Ah, wretch! dare you touch me? Who are you?"

The old trapper's merriment ended as abruptly as if she had poured a bucket of ice-water down his back. As stiff as a soldier of the awkward squad on dress parade, he doffed his shabby old cap, with the mock politeness of offended dignity, making answer:

"Ole Hard Head, at yer sarvice, mum!—a white man what don't every day seek to consort with Injuns nur Greasers—nuther bucks nur squaws!"

The fling at "Greasers" meant that he had already detected her probable Mexican origin.

The removal of his cap showed that he had lost his scalp, and by this Waving Plume recognized one of whom she had heard marvelous stories.

With swift-coming pallor, she cried:

"The Scalpless Hunter!—the great pale-face medicine-man!"

A "medicine-man" is not a physician, but a sorcerer, whose mystic art is called to the aid of the sick only after the old squaws, remedies—roots, barks, herbs etc.—have failed.

The Indian treatment for all fevers, is to fill a hollow with water, roll hot stones into it, squat over the spot enveloped in a blanket in the form of a tent until a profuse perspiration starts from every pore, then plunge into river or lake. Thus treated, small-pox has annihilated whole tribes, none surviving to tell the dreadful story attested only by the bones of the unburied dead.

Having by vaccination stayed this plague

among his captors during the imprisonment which followed the loss of his scalp, Old Hard Head was at once released and at the date of our story the Scalpless Medicine-Man was feared and revered, as one possessed of supernatural powers, from the Columbia to the Rio Grande, wherever the red-man had a lodge.

Hence, overcome with superstitious fear, Waving Plume cast herself at his feet, crying: "Ah! I have offended you! Do not put a spell upon me!"

"Hold on, marm! This hyer won't do! Thar ain't no call fur it. Git up, marm, if you please!" stammered the old fellow, greatly embarrassed at having that pale, frightened face raised in supplication to his. "Spell, be blowed! That's all gammon, ye know. Pow-mow nothin'! Leastways, not a critter so chipper as you be, marm."

"And you will not harm me?"

"You git out! What d'ye take me fur?"

And in this rough fashion he finally reassured her.

Then the woman came to the surface.

"And you are the father of—of Whirlwind?" half shyly, half-coquettishly.

"A father? What! Me! Old Hard Head a daddy of a Delaware? Haw! haw! haw! Waal, marm, not if the court know herself; an' we think she do! Eh! what the deuce has broke loose now?"

For, scarlet with confusion, the maiden wheeled and fled like a startled hare.

"But dash my in'ards if I didn't feel my ole gizzard flop when she dropped down on her marrer-bones an' turned that thar purty face o' hern— But, *waugh!*—dash Injuns, an' Greasers!"

Thus the disconcerted swain, while the maiden visited her humiliation on Whirlwind, the young Delaware.

"Bah! I hate him! He is of the despised tribe! Yes, the despised Delawares!—all of my line have reason to hate them!" came in hot words from her expressive mouth—her hand seeking the ready knife in her girdle.

CHAPTER IV.

TREACHERY.

"My God! they've dropped right onto us! To horse! to horse! Ride for life!"

Crack! Crack! crack!

Yep! yep! yep! yep! yep! yep! yep!

From the deep sleep with which Nature rewards those who dwell in her star-vaulted temple, Lord Annesley bounded to his feet, throwing into position for instant use the repeating rifle that rested across his arm in slumber.

The dull thud of hoofs in the loamy soil, the rattle of fire-arms, the war-cry of the Sioux and the excited ejaculations of his companions, rung in his ears.

Without stop or stay he made a dash for his horse, tethered close by.

In the starlight he saw a troop of savages sweeping across the prairie at a dead run, straining every muscle to reach the horses first, and stampede them.

Excited by the shouts and firing, the animals plunged wildly, and tugged at their lariats in a way that threatened every instant to draw the pins. Then away on the wings of the wind!

There was no time to free the two pack-mules. They and the baggage they had thus far carried so patiently must be abandoned. No time even to draw lariat-pins. A slash with the bowie, a plunging horse backed at a bound; then heel and voice for dear life, to the music of zipping bullets and the "yep-yep" of over a score of bloodthirsty Sioux.

The few hours' rest had freshened their horses wonderfully, the salubrious air of that clime, when not scorched by the sun, being meat and drink to the famishing wretch; and, "laying their bellies to the ground," they swept across the night-shrouded prairie like dusk phantoms, until the savages abandoned the fruitless chase, forced to be content with the mules and camp-supplies they had got.

"Waal, Cap," said Santa Fe Bob, when at last they drew up their horses, to blow them, just as the eastern sky was exchanging its deep purple for a faint pearly tinge, "we come off with the skin of our teeth this time. Thar was no two ways o' doin' it. It was cut an' run, or trade off yer top-piece fur a wig-block!"

"Nothing is so bad that it might not have been worse," said Annesley, cheerfully. "We're lucky to fetch away whole skins—"

"Och, tar and ages! is it whole skins ye're sayin'?" cried Paddy Magee, dolefully. "Be me sowl, it's *holes in our skins* I'm thinkin', that's more belike."

"What's the matter with you?" asked Santa Fe Bob.

"An' it's what's the matther wid me, is it? Mush! what's *not* the matther wid me? Och-hone! och-hone! will I howld wather at all, at all, I dunno, whin we foind it?"

"Have they plugged you?"

"Thru for you, mahn dear, so they have."

"But where?"

"Betwixt wind and wather, just. Av I'm not wid a howl in me stomach the size o' me hond, be jabers, it'll be a surprise to me mornin's breakfast, so it will."

"You'll have no breakfast to put into that hole, Paddy," laughed Bob.

"You've a very healthy wag to yer jaw fur a man with a leak in his commissary department," suggested the Sockdoliger.

"Arrah, thin! is it a joke!" shouted the Irishman, with sudden wrath at the want of sympathy; but Sir Walter calmed him by saying kindly:

"Let us see your wound."

"Sure it's yer honor, sor, that hasn't the haird hairt o' thim divils, more be token it's not the gintleman loike yerself that 'ud be expected to demean yerself—"

But Annesley cut short this stream of blarney with a gesture.

Examination proved that a bullet had indeed ranged across the Irishman's body, lacerating the skin in a way that left a wound more annoying than dangerous.

"Bah! a scratch!" sneered Santa Fe Bob.

If he had only suspected what was to grow out of that "scratch!"

The chase had driven the party of whites further into the desert, and dawn found them with jaded animals miles away from grass or water.

The first gray glow of morning was lighting the eastern sky when Annesley detected his scouts, Santa Fe Bob and Sam the Sockdoliger, exchanging words in private. He put the most natural construction upon the air of embarrassment with which they broke off.

"Come, come, my men!" he said, briskly; "if there is any new danger to face, let us have it out in open counsel. Have you lost your bearings? I know that a first-class scout might do that in the absence of landmarks, so don't hesitate to be frank with me."

Santa Fe Bob was quick-witted enough to jump at this cue.

"Waal, to tell ye the God's truth, Cap," he said, "we air a leetle bit out. Them Injuns run us twenty mile on a clean string, besides cuttin' us out o' the water we was makin' fur. Now I say a leetle to the east'ard gives us the next best show, but Sam allows to push due north. S'pose, then, you keep right on the way ye be, an' I put twenty miles between you an' me, an' then keep abreast of ye, the first that strikes water to send up two smokes?"

Annesley assenting to this plan, the plotter took his departure.

"Waal, I'm blowed!" he chuckled, when far away over the plain, "ef the dog-goned calf didn't play right into my hand! Now fur the ranch of my old pal, Hank Guppy, the toughest cuss on the plains. Ef I don't drop into a snug berth before this thing's through, I lose my guess!"

And excited by his villainous scheme, he gave his jaded horse a touch of the spur.

The remainder of the party toiled on through the hot day. All suffered, but the fever excited by his wound made Paddy Magee fairly savage.

They found water, but so brackish that it afforded relief only while drinking. Soon after their tongues were swollen and dry, and they were distressed by cramps in the stomach.

Near noon on the following day Sam the Sockdoliger uttered a cheer of encouragement, and changing their course slightly, brought them before night to a bubbling fount of pure water.

The horses thrust their muzzles deep into the grateful stream; the men lay on their bellies and drank as if they would never get their fill.

"This is better than a gold mine!" declared Annesley. "But we mustn't forget Bob."

They sent up their smokes at intervals, until

darkness rendered them useless; but scan the eastern rim of the horizon as anxiously as they might, no answering signal appeared.

"Bob has a better set o' legs under him than we have," was Sam, the Sockdoliger's, explanation, "an' not calkalin' for that, he's got ahead of us. There's nothin' for it but to wait until he picks us up again, as he's bound to do. Let Bob alone for that."

Not very well content, yet with no remedy, Annesley stretched himself on the ground for a night's rest, in which he expected to miss neither blanket nor saddle, lost in the Sioux surprise. But the event proved that the suffering through which he had passed told upon his nervous system, so that, while he lay breathing heavily, like a tired man in deep sleep, his mind, not partaking of the torpor of the body, was strangely active.

Without heeding, he heard Paddy Magee grumbling about his wound, as he supposed, to Sam, the Sockdoliger, who was doing duty as guard. But Sam's reply thrilled Annesley with a startling suspicion, and set him instantly on the alert.

"Shut up, you dog-goned fool!" he admonished, in a guarded tone. "You'll have the Cap a-hearin' of you, the fust thing you know, an' knock the hull scheme in the head, ef he drops to our leetle game."

"Divil a bit," rejoined Paddy. "A b'y don't snore that beautiful, an' play 'aves-dropper at wan an' the same toime. Whist, Sam!—it's but a dirty thousand spiece for us annyways, av we play to Bob's game. Now a gintleman the loikes av him has more than that strapped about his body—faix, didn't Bob say 'the same, so's to make sure we'd not be wantin' of our pay? Then why wouldn't we be knockin' him in the head on our own hook, give Bob the go-by, an' have but our own two selves to divide the stake betwene?"

Under ordinary circumstances Paddy Magee might have been tractable enough, but the wound of which Santa Fe Bob had made so light, served to goad the Irishman to reckless impatience. Although Sam, the Sockdoliger, tried to stop his incautious tongue, he persisted until he had had his say, betraying to Annesley the fact that his three guides were united in a plot involving robbery and perhaps murder.

Past dangers had made Sir Walter quick to meet any emergency.

Instantly he rose to a sitting posture, presenting both pistols at his treacherous guides.

"Allow me to have a word to say in this discussion," he said. "Don't trouble yourselves to rise, and let those weapons alone, if you please. Now, gentlemen, what is the meaning of this scheme over which you are at variance, and what part has Santa Fe Bob in it?"

Paddy Magee's jaw dropped. He plainly gave up as outwitted.

Sam, the Sockdoliger, smiled a perfectly devilish grimace of cool sarcasm.

"Excuse me, pardner," he said; "but against some such chance as this I took the liberty to draw the balls from your weapons last night. It'll only be a waste of powder to shoot off them harmless pop-guns."

"Pardon me, if I say that I place more reliance upon them than upon your word," replied Annesley.

"All right," acquiesced Sam, nonchalantly. "Hyer's fur ye, anyway. Ef ye want to shoot, shoot and be—to yel! Now, Paddy!"

And he sprung to his feet to make the threatened assault.

Annesley fired in a direct line with a spot between Sam's eyes.

Sam the Sockdoliger laughed mockingly.

Sure of his aim, Annesley realized that his false guide had told the truth about having tampered with his weapons. He, too, sprung to his feet to grapple in a death-struggle.

But the delay for that fruitless shot had given the Sockdoliger the advantage; and as Annesley arose, ere he could draw his bowie, his arms were pinioned to his side by an embrace like the hug of a young grizzly.

"Now, Paddy!" shouted the Sockdoliger again.

The Irishman sprung forward with a yell of frenzied rage—that unreasoning hate which a murderer conceives toward his intended victim.

With a sickening sense of horror Annesley already seemed to feel the menacing bowie sinking into his back between the shoulder-blades!

CHAPTER V.

THE INDIAN SEERESS.

AND with apparent rancor burning in her heart against the young Delaware, Waving Plume bounded forward, almost running upon a third person, in her anger—Red Wolf, the Kioway chief.

"My father!" she cried, in sweet confusion, as he confronted her; a fine representative red-man, with bearded moccasins, leggins fringed with human hair, a buffalo-skin mantle traced with his totem, a gaudy calico shirt or tunic bedight with silver medals, and a head-dress made of the head of a wolf.

"You speak of a Delaware; has my daughter seen one of the hated tribe?" he asked.

"A Delaware? I? I have seen none. I was but dreaming of the legend of the White Canoe, told me by old Wa-wa-kee-to," replied the girl, lying glibly and struggling to prevent the tell-tale blood from flushing her cheek. Then hastening to divert his attention from her unlucky words:

"But whom do you think I have seen? Ah! I was dead with fear!"

"You?—a chief's daughter?"

"But what brave dares more than whisper his name, lest he should take offense and strike with invisible hand? It was the Scalpless Hunter!"

"Ugh! Is he in this glen? Let us go to him." Out of the frying-pan into the fire!

But what woman's wit is not equal to the defense of her lover?

With apparent readiness, Waving Plume set out to guide her sire; but at the first piece of rocky ground, down she went in a heap, with a little shriek, as if with a turned ankle.

Ordinarily, a savage would deem it unworthy of his manhood to play pack-mule to a squaw; but old Red Wolf had a very soft spot in his heart for his favorite, and actually condescended to lift the little hypocrite in his arms and carry her toward their camp.

She in turn spared his dignity, by considerately having him set her down before they came in sight of any one, to wait until some of her own sex should be sent to her father's assistance.

Old Wa-wa-kee-to was a hag of hags. She claimed that the burden of a hundred and fifty years rested upon her bowed form; and certainly her appearance went far to confirm the statement.

Bent until she presented the figure of an inverted L, her body from hips to head being almost horizontal, she walked with two sticks, black with age, and so twisted as to look like a couple of snakes; the hands, with fingers distorted by enlarged joints, almost seeming a part of the knotted cane-heads they clutched like claws. Her face was so wrinkled as to resemble a bunch on the trunk of some gnarled old oak.

On state occasions, her long white hair fell straight from her head, like a veil trailing on the ground, so that she nearly stepped upon it as she walked. Ordinarily, to prevent the ends from being thus worn off, it was gathered up in a weird-looking, conical hat, from which dangled, by threads, all kinds of bugs and spiders—all the insects that are most repulsive. Her dress, too, which was a mantle of intricate folds and fluttering tags, was profusely decorated with these creeping horrors, besides being hung with the dried skins of snakes, lizards, toads—all the reptiles, the touch of which, makes the flesh creep!

From earliest infancy the Kioway heroine had known no other mother. The instinctive coquetry of her Spanish blood cropped out in a thousand little caressing ways, until the old seeress learned to love the only living thing that looked upon her without fear, and won it by that indulgence with which our grandmothers spoil us all.

Accompanied by two coffee-colored handmaidens, alternately "jawing" them, and crooning her sympathy for her darling's supposed suffering, this old beldam came to the assistance of the little fraud, who limped between her two supports like a martyred angel, while Wa-wa-kee-to fetched up the rear like an old woman shoeing geese.

In the village the dogs and children stood at a respectful distance, awed into perfect silence by Wa-wa-kee-to, and stared with all their bead-like little black eyes.

More than one young brave felt his heart warm with sympathy for the fair sufferer, while he gazed at her with a face as impassive as an iron mask.

And all this while Miss Humbug was slyly laughing to herself.

Once within the shelter of the lodge which she shared with her foster-mother, Waving Plume turned upon her handmaids with a burst of petulance that drove them scurrying, abashed, from her presence. The instant the flap dropped behind them, she nearly took old Wa-wa-kee-to's breath away by executing a pigeon's wing.

"Ah! what magic is this?" cried the old seeress, aghast.

She who knew that all "medicine"—the Indian word for mystery—was humbug, began to think that she was actually beholding a miracle more marvelous than any of her own impostures.

Waving Plume replied with a gay laugh and a Kioway word which may be translated:

"Nonsense!"

"But the Red Wolf will be angry," suggested her foster-mother, in a tone that showed that she forgave the harrowing of her own feelings.

"If he finds it out!" supplemented Waving Plume. "Is it so many, many years since you was a girl, that you cannot remember ever having to match the paw of the bear with the tail of the fox?"

"But why this deception?"

You may believe that the girl evaded that question, which would have laid bare a secret that no prying eye must surprise.

On the other hand, with the tyranny of a spoiled darling, she forced Wa-wa-kee-to to lend herself blindly to the plot.

That night what appeared to be the old seeress emerged from the lodge and left the village, unchallenged by the sentinels. The sky was black and lowering; wrathful thunder-mutterings rumbled afar among the mountains, and the chill of the approaching storm was already borne on the night wind. They supposed that her wizard craft called her abroad in the tempest, to gather mysterious herbs, whose virtues ripened only amid the most awful convulsions of nature.

Free of the village, Waving Plume hid her disguise in a hollow log, and, heedless of the storm, which now broke in all its fury—the lightning glare, the bellowing thunder, the swashing rain, the writhing trees, whose branches sometimes slatted her in the face with blinding force—made her way to the Scalpless Hunter's habitation, amid pitfalls and other hidden dangers, to an interview with one of whom she muttered:

"He is a Delaware—I hate him! But he and the Red Wolf must not meet. Let him fall by some other hand—not by my father's."

From Old Hard Head's dug-out, when she reached it, proceeded strange noises, the regular tum-tum of an Indian drum, a shuffling sound, incessant, furious barking, and bursts of uproarious laughter in a gruff voice.

Rare sport of some kind was going on; but if Whirlwind was sharing it, he did not make himself heard.

Stealing on tiptoe to the leeward side of the house, that the dog's keen scent might not detect her, Waving Plume peered through a chink in upon a scene such as is nowhere enacted save where men are driven by solitude to seek the rudest sports.

At that moment she felt herself seized from behind, and a strong, broad palm pressed close down over mouth.

She struggled madly.

CHAPTER VI.

A DASTARD'S GAME.

THE boundless prairie—a vast herd of grazing cattle—a flat-roofed adobe house, with adjacent corrals.

Without, the house is a fortification; within, doors and windows to the various apartments open upon a colonnade running all round an open square, while at one point a stairway leads up to the tiled roof.

On the southern, hence shady, side of the patio the veranda is embowered by a thick-leaved vine. Peering behind it, we discover the end of a silken hammock; a pair of daintily-slippered feet; a gay trailing shawl; a Spanish mandolin; a soft, shapely berry-brown hand; a bodice that would tempt an anchorite; a fluffy mass of lace that rises and falls with bewitching suggestiveness.

But what lies beyond? A bee-stung lip?—olive cheeks aglow?—coiling black tresses?—melting, sloe-black eyes?

Breathlessly we peep. Ah! what a picture!

The lip is cherry-red; but the cheek, browned indeed by the too fervent kisses of the sun, is far from olive; and the hair is divinely blonde.

Long, curving, golden lashes lie upon her cheek. In her innocence and beauty she sleeps!

Not waking her, we pass beyond to a door which is jealously closed, and enter unobserved the presence of two men, the younger of whom lounges listlessly at a table with wine before him and cigarette between his first and second fingers, while the elder paces the floor with a disturbed frown.

"Coolly, gov'nor! coolly!" drawled the former. "Where's the rhyme or reason in lashing oneself into a fury this confounded hot weather? Sit down! sit down! There's your wine; and you can roll your own cigarettes, can't you? And now let's start at the beginning. Here are you and I, father and son, a pair of precious rogues—"

"Is there hany call for thet, 'Arry?" reproachfully.

"Eh?" with affected surprise. "You don't deny it, do you?"

"I don't say hanythink about it."

"Exactly; and it's just such rascals, too weak-stomached to call things by their right names, who are constantly tripping themselves up. I insist upon it—you and I, a pair of consummate knaves, have conspired to get possession of the inheritance of an heiress, as beautiful as she is unsuspecting, and who looks upon you and me in the light of a father and brother respectively."

"Ave it your hown way!" doggedly. "But I'd 'int that your voice is a trifle loud."

"What! with that door hermetically sealed, as if every one in the house was not sound asleep! Phew! I wonder if they have it any hotter down in the other place!"

"Ere's one that's not asleep, at hany rate!" cried the father, with a startled look.

At that moment a timid knock was heard, the door opened not more than an inch or two, and a low, deprecating voice asked from the other side:—

"'Enry, are you 'ere?"

Striding to the door, "'Enry" wrenched it wide open, demanding and commanding with a very unlovely scowl:—

"Well Mary Hann, w'ot the deuce do you want now? Cawn't you let me be for two minutes together? Blarst my two heyes if the woman ain't shiverin' this blessed 'ot day! If there's hannythink I 'ate, it's a lawkadaisical 'ussy halways a-w'inin'! Come! be hoff with you! W'en you're wanted you'll be called."

"All of which you will please consider an invitation to come in and sit down," interposed Harry, coolly. "The old gentleman hasn't a very bappy way of putting it; but he means well."

And with a deprecating glance at her surly husband the woman crept past him, in obedience to the real master, their son.

"Take a seat, most excellent of mothers and most pitiful of women," dutifully pushing a chair toward her with his foot. "You appear more than usually broke-up to-day. A glass of wine is what you want, to drive the wind off your stomach and put some heart into you."

She was indeed a pitiful creature—little and shriveled and faded. Wincing at every unexpected sound or movement, she sat on the edge of her chair and sipped her wine as if in momentary fear of some harsh rebuke.

Her lord, florid and bull-necked and pudgy, resumed his seat without relaxing his sullen frown.

"And now to business," said Harry. "Let me see—we begin in Merry England. There lived Sir Arthur Annesley, of honored memory. Heir had he none, but in the providence of Heaven an heiress, the fair Olivia, apple of his eye."

"And well might she be!" interposed Mrs. Oliphant, with a whimper and a doleful shake of the head, lifting the corner of her apron to apply it to her tear-filling eyes. "The dearest, sweetest—"

"Drat ye!" roared "'Enry."

Mary Ann jumped as if a bombshell had burst just beneath her chair.

Their son placidly kept on:

"So thought the young Don Gofredo Carmagnola, *attache* of the Spanish legation, boasting the bluest of Castilian blood, but with castles only in Spain; i. e., he hadn't a rap to bless himself with! But looking into his

divine eyes, listening to his entrancing voice, how could the fair Olivia remember that? He, worldly wise, pleaded an elopement; she, like the sweetest of Eve's daughters, 'sighing she would ne'er consent,' consented!"

Mrs. O. "Alackaday! poor lamb!"

THE GENTLE "'ENRY." "Blubberin' fool!"

HARRY (serenely). "Sir Arthur shut his heart and home against his erring daughter, and would have let the lovers starve, but that her mother's dower was settled upon the fair Olivia. But what was a paltry thousand a year to my lord and my lady? A beggar's pittance! So, shaking the dust of the tight little isle from their feet, they hied them away to Mexico, to mend their fortunes."

"Now, long in the service of the fair Olivia was one, Mary Ann Chubb, who, beguiled at a tender age by the wheedling tongue of a certain lusty butcher's boy, Henry Guppy by name, left a kind mistress to take her regular Saturday night wife-beatings in his one-roomed castle."

"And no 'arm done 'er!" growled Mr. Oliphant, like a sulky gorilla, while his spouse only sobbed over these reminiscences of the past.

"Guppy," resumed Harry, "had at least one gentlemanly accomplishment—he was a famous huntsman. Not that he rode to hounds. Oh, dear, no!—he was far too modest for that. He hid his light under a bushel, so to speak; i. e., gratified his aristocratic tastes only at night. The lordlings over the fish-pond call it poaching; so our young Nimrod was lagged, and sent to Van Diemen's Land for the good of his country."

"Blast their heyes! it was the luckiest job of 's life!" interposed Mr. Oliphant, with feeling.

"Yes," admitted his son, carelessly; "and it gave Mary Ann an opportunity to see whether her beauty was impaired by the absence of the familiar black eye; but she lost the amusement of keeping tally of the bruises on various parts of her body."

"You're too hard on 'im, 'Arry," murmured Mrs. Oliphant, faintly.

"She returned to the service of the fair Olivia with a bouncing boy in her arms. But, within the twelvemonth, in far Mexico, the poacher's son was crowded from his mother's lap by a daughter of the House of Carmagnola."

"Ah! sweet cherub!" murmured Mrs. Oliphant. "But she was bought with my dear mistress's life! 'I leave 'er with you, Mary Hann,' says my lady, 'as 'ow she'll never know hany other mother, poor darling!' And then the sweet hangel shut 'er heyes on this world, as the Lord knows she was too good to tarry in! Oh, me! oh, me!"

"Drat ye!" thundered "'Enry," bringing his fist down upon the table with a crash that frightened Mrs. Oliphant's grief all away. "Darn a blubberin' wench!"

"Don Gofredo's cattle dotted the p'ain," pursued Harry undisturbed. "His hacienda, unlike his early 'castles in Spain,' was of substantial adobes. But the fierce Kioway swept Mexico's fairest province with torch and tomahawk, leaving Don Gofredo's blood on his door-stone, his hacienda in ruins, and bearing his cattle and horses to their mountain fastness."

"Oh, bitter day!" moaned Mrs. Oliphant.

"Oh, day that put beverything into hour pockets!" amended Mr. Oliphant, with emphasis.

"But just before this calamity, lol our old friend Guppy put in an unexpected (shall I add unwelcome?) appearance, to press his claim to wifely loyalty from Mary Ann, alleging that a lucky shipwreck had favored his escape. There may be some mistake about that story," observing that his father chuckled softly to himself with a wolfish glitter in his eyes, while his mother shuddered and began to rock her body back and forth. "I suppose now a watchful and plucky fellow—like Guppy, for instance—might have got a chance to strangle a guard, or knock him on the head, jump into the sea, and swim—"

"Don't be too sharp, lad," interrupted Mr. Oliphant, huskily, scowling, yet turning pale. "It's naught to you—"

"True. Enough that Guppy proved himself as great a scoundrel as is unchanged. He swore his wife to secrecy, robbed her of all her savings, and then made her steal from her employer, to supply him with money for idle debauchery."

"W'ot's a wife good for as won't 'elp 'er

husband w'en 'e's down on 'is luck?" demanded Mr. Oliphant, virtuously. "And w'en the Hinjuns come, didn't I save her bloody life, blarst 'er heyes! and the brat's, too? Then w'ot 'as she got to growl about?"

"What, indeed?" assented his son, sarcastically. "And when the danger was past, you were so good as to take charge of Don Gofredo's secreted valuables, the whereabouts of which you half persuaded and half forced your wife to reveal to you. Then, leaving the world to suppose that the baby-heiress had been killed or carried into Indian captivity, you came here to New Mexico, and established this ranch—"

"Worth this minute a cool 'undred thousand!—don't forget that; and hall for you, some day—little thanks I get for it!"

"But now comes a new scheme," pursued his son, manifesting not a shadow of gratitude. "Sir Arthur Annesley has gone the way of all flesh, sticking to his disinheritance of his daughter and his daughter's heirs to the very last, and willing all of his alienable property where his title and entailed estates go by operation of law, to one Walter Burleigh, the last of his race, and cousin twice removed of the fair Ollie whom we all love so dearly, and who is sleeping in such sweet unconsciousness out yonder in her hammock. This Walter—now Sir Walter—like the romantic young sap-head that he is, declares that he will not lend himself to a hard-hearted old curmudgeon's whim, and rob one of his own blood. Thereupon he turns his back on his baronial estates, slips from the lap of luxury, and crosses the ocean; to find that the off-cast daughter is dead, and her child suppose to be among the Kioways. At the risk of having the scalp lifted from his lordly yet addled pate, he resolves to come hither in quest of her."

"And now we come to the plot of our ex-butcher's boy, ex-poacher, etc., etc., etc."

"His lordship, Sir Walter—um—removed, our pretty Ollie alone stands between a great barony and its reversion to the crown; and her son, if she is blessed with one, becomes my Lord Annesley, in spite of the dev—that is to say, his hard-hearted old great-grandfather."

"If, then," reasons the ex-representative to Van Diemen's Land, 'we wed our son to this lost princess, and see that her fool of a cousin is comfortably knocked in the head, behold, we (lagged and what-not to our discredit notwithstanding) become grandfather to an ENGLISH EARL!'"

"That's it! that's it!" shouted Mr. Oliphant, striking the table with his fist and springing to his feet in his excitement. "'Ank Guppy's blood may yet set on the throne, blast their heyes! My Lo-ord 'Enry! You're to call 'im 'Enry, mind! And the day 'e puts on 's bearl's robes, you're to tell 'im *Hi* put 'im w're 'e his!—Hi, 'Enry Guppy! But, 'Arry, you needn't tell 'im I was lagged. It won't do 'im no sort of good to know that."

"No," promised Harry, laughing at his father's sudden shame, "I'll remember not to tell him that!"

"But, oh, 'Arry!" cried his mother, extending her hands toward him in supplication, "you *won't* do it? you *won't* so wrong that hinnocent lamb? It ain't for the like of hus to presume to wed into the nobility—"

But here Mr. Oliphant burst into a torrent of furious oaths, and no doubt would have fallen to beating his offending wife had not their affectionate son languidly stuck up his foot between them, expostulating:

"Hold on, gov'nor! none of that, if you please. That playful custom of the Old Country won't do in this."

"To proceed: information that Lord Walter is on his way hither has been brought you by Santa Fe Bob, an old pal in crime, who agrees to remove his lordship in consideration of being given a clear title to this ranch and appurtenances as soon as your son comes into possession of his wife's English estates. If you do not accept this proposal, he will sell his secret to Lord—"

But just here came a most startling interruption.

According to the custom of the country, the window should have been merely an opening, closed when desirable by a tight board shutter; but this had in addition an inner hinged sash, in which a piece of white muslin was made to do service where my reader would have expected glass.

A slight scuffling sound was heard without. Then through this cloth screen, as through a papered hoop in a circus, the body of a man

was hurled headforemost, to fall sprawling at the feet of the astonished conspirators.

Mrs. Oliphant screamed; Mr. Oliphant swore; their son only suspended his cigarette on its way to his lips.

Lounging with his elbows on the window-sill, a man whose sinister face and swaggering air proclaimed the rascal as daring as unscrupulous, stared in upon them with an insolent grin. But at the sound of a light footstep, he turned, the light of bold admiration leaped into his evil eyes, and from his lips an involuntary ejaculation:

"The devil and all!"

Ollie, roused by the disturbance, stood questioning Santa Fe Bob with her startled eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAIL OF BLOOD.

OLD HARD HEAD'S dug-out was a log hut built into the side of a hill, thatched with turf and closed with a heavy-barred puncheon door.

Across one corner, as is common in New Mexico, was built an adobe fireplace. Two comfortable couches of dried mountain moss covered with buffalo-skins and blankets, and two rude stools made up the furniture of the room.

Upon these latter squatted a pair of young grizzlies, with a paw on either side of their snouts, like children holding their hands before their faces. But from behind their paws peered bright little eyes, with such evident anxiety that any one one would have laughed to see them.

"Beggin' fur yer supper, eh?" was Old Hard Head's salutation, as he entered and rested his rifle on a stag-horn rack above the fireplace. "Look out thar, Tippecanoe! Ef you furgit yer manners, not a snack do ye get! Now thar's Tyler-too as is a little lady."

To which his bearship replied with a petulant whine.

Their whimsical names were taken from an old presidential campaign song. Similarly his rifle was called Old Ironsides, his dog Rough-and-Ready, and a little burro, whose acquaintance we shall make presently, Old Hickory.

Old Hard Head's first care was to build a "rousing" fire in she adobe fireplace, not, as my reader would probably have done, by laying the fuel horizontally, but by standing it on end.

"Waugh! — eh-haw! — eh-haw! — eh-haw! haw! haw! haw!" came from without.

"Come, my beauties. Old Hick's tired o' waitin'," said the old hunter; and the cubs dropped to the ground with alacrity, and waddled after him.

At the door they were awaited by the longest-eared, shortest-legged, raggedest-coated of little donkeys, as rough as burr-oak and as tough as iron-wood.

Old Hard Head gave him some coarse salt; and the whole party went down to the creek which ran before the dug-out. Here the old trapper skinned the animals he had caught that day, throwing to the bears such parts as they liked best, giving Rough-and-Ready a bone to gnaw, and setting aside for his own and Whirlwind's delectation a savory morsel of beaver's-tail, flanked by a juicy steak of venison.

On returning to the cabin he found a bed of glowing coals awaiting him, over which he warmed two long-handled frying-pans, greased them with a piece of bacon, and poured into them a thin layer of batter which a model housewife would probably have viewed somewhat dubiously. When these cakes were done on one side, a skillful rotary toss of first one pan and then the other threw them into the air and turned them over, to be caught the other side up. This is the mode of preparing the famous flap-jack!

The venison-steak was nicely broiled on two green twigs. The beaver's tail was boiled. Coffee was made from a mixture of real coffee with the acorn of the white-oak.

While the frugal repast was in course of preparation, dog and bears suddenly rushed pell-mell from the cabin, to return accompanied by Whirlwind; while Old Hickory was driven away from the door by a vicious little bronco, who in his turn was kept from boldly entering by Rough-and-Ready.

"Waal, boy!" queried the old trapper, without turning his head.

"Ugh!" ejaculated his *protege*, with a genuine Indian grunt of disdain. "Boy no longer! Am I not a brave? See!"

And he threw the fresh bearskin from his shoulder to the earthen floor.

"Dash my buckskin breeches! Eh! What? Why, you've had a rip-roarin' scrimmage! Sho, now! you never tussled that critter alone? I'm a Greaser, ef he wouldn't kick the beam at a hundred an' fifty stone [1200 lbs.]. An' that pelt," as he spread it out, "ain't bored with nothin' but knife-holes! Look a-hyer, Delaware, you ain't been fool enough to tackle that ornery cuss with nothin' but a knife?"

"Was the trail of his heart so long that a knife wouldn't reach it, if the hunter but stood near enough?" asked Whirlwind, coolly.

Then he told the story of his encounter in a few simple words, as became one too brave to be boastful. But when he launched forth in glowing praises of Waving Plume's beauty and courage, his tongue out-babbled the mountain brook.

"M—h'm! So *that's* the why she clawed the old man so spiteful!" growled Old Hard Head, turning from the enthusiastic lover in high dudgeon, and addressing himself to his interrupted culinary duties. "She was as fine as a fiddle, I'll swear, with that young cub a-whinin' around her—riggin' necklaces o' b'ar's claws, an' sich gimcracks—waugh!"

Then turning round, he went on with paternal solemnity of warning:

"Look a-hyer, boy—take an ole man's advice, what has seen more o' this hyer world than you hev. *Let squaws alone!—let 'em alone!* They're bad medicine, now mind I tell ye!—*this 'un* in partic'lar. She's got the sperrit o' the devil in her, and a squaw what's always fur w'arin' the breeches ain't no good in the wigwam—ye hyear me! She'll make a reg'lar dog of ye, to fetch an' carry at her beck an' nod. You'll do squaw's work while *she* runs the ranch."

Whirlwind shook his head with an incredulous smile.

"That is the whiteman's way," he said; "but a great chief knows how to manage the squaw better than that. But, alas! what is all this to me? The Red Wolf is at feud with the Delawares; his child turned coldly away from my love."

"Eh! she scorned ye, boy—an' because ye're a Delaware?"

"Yes."

"Dash it!" cried Old Hard Head, striking his knee in a towering rage. "She turns up her nose at us, does she? Waal, by the great horn spoon! ef we want her, we're bound to have her! Ef pelts won't buy her, horses will; an' ef horses won't, by the eternal varmint, *whisky* will! Injuns never runs away from whisky, an' lets it sp'ile. An' that ole leather-face dad o' hern shall have a bar'l of it—a river of it—dash my gourds ef I don't dreen that thar lake, an' fill 'er up with corn-juice fur the ole cuss to waller in, but we'll have that thar squaw in this hyer dug-out! Don't yer worry, boy; she's jist as good as yourn this minute. I'll fix that leetle matter up the fust thing in the mornin'."

But though the old trapper so generously forgot his own snubbing in resenting the slight to his *protege*, Whirlwind had notions of his own on the subject of wooing.

He was wild to go at once for scalps, though his enthusiasm did not seem to interfere with his appetite; but as soon as he had satisfied his hunger, he cried:

"Come! see if I have not profited by your lessons!"

From the wall he took a pair of bowie-knives—whose edges had been ground round and the points tipped with bits of lead, so that they could be used for practice without inflicting wounds—a brace of revolvers, a short-barreled carbine, a short, stout bow and arrow, a tomahawk and a lasso.

Smiling indulgently, Old Hard Head followed him out of the cabin.

Placing a small mark at twenty paces, Whirlwind drew a revolver in either hand and blazed away as rapidly as he could fire.

"Good! good!" cried the old hunter, as he counted the marks of eleven bullets within a small radius.

Without a word, Whirlwind bent his bow and filled the spot with arrows until it bristled like a porcupine's back, in the midst of which, he planted his tomahawk.

With quick, graceful motions, he coiled his lasso, made a sharp hissing sound to attract Rough-and-Ready's attention, and shied a stick through the air. As the dog bounded in pur-

suit, the lasso shot forth and caught him about the neck, tumbling him heels over head, to his evident surprise and chagrin.

Taking no heed of his guardian's approval of his skill, the Indian youth silently handed his patron one of the bowie-knives, having first daubed their blunted points, as is customary with rapiers, that they may leave a spot where ever they touch.

"So ye think young Jack's about as good as his master? Not jest yet, my boy!" cried Old Hard Head, entering upon the contest with a smile which told that he thought "the old man" could take the conceit out of this young buck.

The old trapper's muscles proved to be like steel in strength and elasticity; but his pupil was as quick and supple as an eel.

Round and round, forward and back, now here, now there, they went, their knives clashing and grinding, as steel met steel in skillful parry.

Old Hard Head laughed when he baffled some subtle assault of his adversary, or taxed him to the utmost to meet some trick of his own. He taunted him, to break down his cool self-possession; but Whirlwind would not "lose his head," as the saying is. Bringing every energy and resource to the task, he fought with cool judgment, and was rewarded by making the first spot over the old hunter's heart.

With a light, pleasant laugh he dropped his knife and instantly clinched his adversary.

"Drat ye! ye'll find the old man's to home—every bit of him!" gasped the trapper, as he writhed in the grasp of this young red Titan; and beaten in the last encounter, he got down to his metal.

Whirlwind succumbed to the strength that had been trained in many a death grapple, and "went to grass," but as quick as lightning rolled his adversary over. Then, with a ready wit, he let the old man gain the upper hand as a finish to the contest.

"You've got a mighty peert slight; but ye can't rule the roost yet awhile!" was the self-satisfied comment of the victor.

Laughing as pleasantly as before, the young Delaware took up his carbine, as if to show that he could conquer that tremor which follows a severe muscular strain.

At a little distance below the cabin the creek emptied into a lake. Far out on its bosom, now glassy with the dead calm which often precedes a storm, floated a loon.

For one moment, as the sight came into line, the marksman paused, while with a masterful effort he conquered his nerves. Then there came a sharp crack, a puff of smoke, the spat of a bullet in the water beyond the loon, and the bird's head lopped over. Its neck had been pierced.

"Boy," said the old medicine, with earnest cordiality, "I can't l'arn you nothin' more!"

Thereupon Whirlwind seemed seized by a sudden craze.

"Then, *away!*" he cried. "I must take scalps to fringe my leggins! See! see! it is the crimson trail!—it is the blood of the enemies of my people! It beckons me! I come! I come!"

He pointed to the lake. The sun, breaking through the clouds just on the point of setting, touched the under surface of the black vapor-pall overhead, tinting it blood-red, so that, by reflection, the glassy lake looked like a pool of blood.

Springing away, he caught his bronco, secured upon him his horse-hair bridle, leaped upon his back, and dashed away with a ringing war-whoop. Into the lake sprung horse and rider, and swam straight for the other side. On the further bank Whirlwind turned and swung his lariat above his head. A halloo, faint with distance, came across the water. Then the adventurer disappeared among the trees, just as the storm burst.

"That's the Injun way," reflected Old Hard Head, as he turned to re-enter his dug-out. "But he's a good 'un. He'll bring somethin' back!"

On a wooden scone driven into the wall stood an old sardine box, containing bear's grease, with a piece of rag sticking over the side. The old trapper lighted his primitive lamp, then getting down an Indian tum-tum, a kind of drum half filled with water, he began to beat upon it.

To this music the bears danced, now singly, now with their fore paws about each other like a couple of waltzers, while Rough-and-Ready

enjoyed himself frisking about and keeping up a barking accompaniment.

This fun was brought to an abrupt termination by a piercing shriek just without the cabin.

Seizing his rifle, O'd Hard Head rushed out into the night, followed by Rough-and-Ready, barking furiously.

He found nothing but the bellowing thunder, the swashing rain, the angry wind, and the moaning forest.

After an excursion into the darkness, Rough-and-Ready returned, whining with disappointment.

For a time the old hunter stood with the rain beating in his face. Then shaking his head forebodingly, he returned in-doors.

"Tain't no use," he said, gloomily. "That wa'n't human! I reckon it means bad luck to the boy!"

With the weight of superstition upon him, he sat far into the night, gazing vacantly into the dying embers.

He loved the Indian youth as an own and only son.

Ah! could he have known that that quickly-smothered cry had come from the lips of Whirlwind's Kioway princess!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MILK-WHITE MARE.

To ride his bronco ten or fifteen miles through the storm, over slippery, treacherous ground, then to cower under a shelving rock, wrapped in a wet blanket, and shiver till daylight, was perhaps very romantic—it was certainly very uncomfortable! In the morning the Delaware boy-brave found himself with an appetite such as is known to only a healthy young savage, and, to satisfy it, a hare, to be eaten raw (since everything was too wet to start a fire with the simple means at his command), a few berries and a draught at a mountain brook.

"But a great chief scorns to grumble at privation," was his philosophic reflection. "My ancestors have gone days without food of any kind, nor fainted, nor murmured."

Before night, he reached the foothills that skirt the boundless prairie.

"Somewhere out there my horse is roaming free!" he cried. "Uncurbed of bit, never burdened by any weight, until now he has known no will save his own; but soon he will answer gladly to my whistle, and put his muzzle lovingly into my palm."

"You—" to the little bronco that thus far had served him acceptably enough—"shall go free. You are not fit for a warrior! I must have a steed so fleet that my enemies might better chase the west wind."

That night he camped in a chaparral on the bank of a watercourse, where the beasts of the prairie found a ford and drinking-place.

Excited anticipation of the morrow kept him long awake; but the loss of sleep on the previous night and the hard day's ride finally told; and the sun was trembling just below the horizon when he roused to the consciousness of having overslept himself just when he was most eager to be on the alert.

Instantly his eye sought the prairie, and there to the northward he discovered that which thrilled him to the very marrow of his bones—a herd of wild horses coming directly toward him!

In the van was a bay stallion with heavy neck and counter, and flowing mane and tail—an animal of magnificent build and spirit.

Yet not upon him but on another, did the young Delaware's eyes fasten with a glow of wild longing.

Beside the king of the herd stepped a milk-white mare, as light, as lissom, as any fairy. Her slender, supple legs told of speed, her well-opened nostrils of wind, her clear, bright, active (yet not restive, nor vicious) eye of that high spirit which is conquered only by death.

How daintily she stepped! how coquettishly she arched her graceful neck! Plainly she was the sultana of the herd.

The bay stallion played about her constantly—now biting her playfully; now snapping viciously at some rival who made bold advances to win his attention from his favorite; now whinnying in soft, wooing cadences; now curvetting and showing off his graces like any gallant.

A prettier spectacle never was witnessed. Whirlwind lost his head entirely. He had but one thought—to possess this peerless mare!

Luckily the wind was coming down with

the herd, and the bronco, instead of being picketed out on the prairie to graze, had been tied out of sight within the thicket.

But a sound! Should he voice a shrill greeting, it would startle them—perhaps turn them back; the opportunity would be lost forever!

In a frenzy of apprehension the boy sprang to the side of the little animal, made it lie down, and instantly plunged his knife into its throat, severing the jugular vein!

All past services forgotten, it was an ungrateful thing to do. But the young warrior was half crazed with excitement. In that supreme moment he would have bartered his left hand, if need were.

The violent struggles over, ere life was yet wholly extinct, he snatched off the bridle, and crept back to his post.

Nearer and nearer drew the herd, until Whirlwind gathered himself, ready to spring up and make the cast at the slightest symptom of alarm.

At that moment the broncho gave a final flirt of his heels, as he sunk on his side in death.

The sensitive ear of the stallion detected this slight sound, and instantly the whole herd was brought to a standstill.

Whirlwind was trembling with rage and apprehension. The coveted mare was barely within range of his lariat.

The stallion tossed his head and sniffed the air suspiciously, his ears pricked sharply forward. Then he pawed the ground and snorted, as if a challenge to the hidden foe.

Not a sound replied from the copse.

Warily he advanced, then wheeled upon his hind feet and gave two or three bounds in retreat.

If anything was ambushed, it would not be thus drawn from cover.

Again the bay stallion advanced, now boldly, nearer; then stopped and tossed his head. How his eyes glowed! how on the alert was every sense! His majestic beauty half won Whirlwind's allegiance from the milk-white mare.

But at that moment, as if to share the danger with her dear lord, the little beauty advanced timidly to his side, and uttered a low whinny.

The young Delaware felt his heart bound. The blood surged into his brain until he felt dizzy. He could endure no more. He now had a fair chance; if he waited for more, they might turn back never to return.

He rose out of the bushes. The lasso whirled about his head, and shot forth like a long serpent.

With a shrill cry of alarm, the stallion reared and wheeled, clearing the ground with stag-like leaps.

The mare essayed to follow; but while yet she pivoted on her hind feet, the fatal noose settled over her head.

At that same instant the other end of the lasso was whirled twice around the bole of a sapling beside which the youth had taken his stand; and, bracing himself firmly, he awaited the twang.

It came, the first bound hurling the mare to the ground, and tightening the noose so that it cut her tender flesh cruelly, and threatened speedy suffocation.

The instant the first strain was off the lariat, Whirlwind tied his end rapidly, yet securely. Then, with a yell of almost insane delight, he sprang out of the copse, swinging his blanket over his head and firing his pistol.

Although the herd had fled at the first note of alarm, the bay stallion, seeing his queen down, turned in desperation to fight for her. But the yells, the pistol-shots, and above all the flapping of the folds of the blanket, completed his terror, and, with a cry of despair, he abandoned his hapless partner.

She was in the act of struggling to her feet when the daring boy had covered half the distance to his prize. A violent tug sideways on the lariat again rolled her over, and before she could gather herself anew her destined master was upon her.

His knee was upon her neck, pinning her proud head to the ground. Struggle as madly as she might, he held her firmly, presenting the bit to her mouth.

With the spitefulness of a cat she snapped at him, tearing his hand slightly; but the bit glided between her teeth, her first contact with the iron that made her a slave to another's will.

As if she knew this, she threw all the force

of her high-strung spirit into a frantic protest. Her eyes glared; her blood-red nostrils quivered; her body writhed; she uttered a cry almost human in its rage and terror.

But Whirlwind, for the time beside himself with wild elation, felt the strength of a giant infused into his muscles. He secured the bridle, then enveloped the captive's head in his blanket, and lastly cut the lasso that was choking her.

The poor brute lay still now, panting from her fierce exertions.

Far in the distance a cloud of dust showed where her late companions were scampering over the prairie.

"Keep on! May the Manitou wing your feet for flight!" chuckled the young captor. "My pretty one must not overtake you—must never see you again."

Impatiently he waited for them to get a fair start. Ten, twenty, thirty minutes passed—an hour; and yet he held his prize down. Long since she had ceased those futile efforts to rise, and now lay much quieted, yet quivering in every nerve with fear.

At last, without warning, Whirlwind released her head and sprang astride of her recumbent body.

In a twinkling she struggled to her feet, to find an unwonted burden firmly fixed on her back. As yet she was blindfold, and so stood trembling, with her head slightly drooped, and her limbs gathered in readiness for the first instant of freedom.

Assured of his seat, the Delaware boy whisked the blanket from her head.

First came a snort of rage, then a rebellious toss of the head and a plunge like a thunderbolt, her heels going into the air with such force that they seemed almost to snap.

Her captor's body followed her movements, poised with the grace of a centaur.

Again and again she reared, pawing the air; then leaped abruptly from side to side; then kicked furiously; then plunged forward, to come down with a shock that seemed as if it must hurl anything human over her head.

The unwelcome burden clung as if glued to its place.

She lay down.

Whirlwind alighted on his feet astride of her, and prevented her from rolling over.

She rose, to find him in his old place.

Screaming with impotent rage, she snapped at him with her white teeth.

He struck her pink muzzle with his fist.

It cut him to the heart to show her this necessary harshness. Once conquered, he would never again raise his hand against her in unkindness. Already he loved her with the tenderness due to a sweetheart.

At last she found that she could not rid herself, of her captor. Then came blind terror and that headlong race, which was but the beginning of the end.

She cleft the air like a bird, her head stretched far forward, her ears laid close back, her body drooped low, and her taper limbs swinging back and forth with such rapidity that they could not be followed by the eye.

It was a mildly exhilarating race, but little short of real railroad speed.

"Faster! faster! she is the fleetest arrow ever shot from bow! Ah! pretty one, you shall bear me to my love—to Waving Plume! She is your only rival in my heart! Away! away! You alone are enough to make your master a great chief!"

Far in their rear the belt of timber that marked the watercourse had sunk below the horizon. They saw buffalo, and the timid antelope that sped away with a cock of the tail. They dashed through a prairie-dog town, at the imminent risk of both their necks. They forded streams, into the water with a plunge, out of it with a scramble, and on, still on.

The sun climbed the sky.

Whirlwind's empty stomach began to clamor for the forgotten breakfast—not in the form of hunger, but in a weakness disproportioned to even the severe tax to which his young muscles had been subjected.

The action of his steed became labored. She gasped painfully; and flecks of bloody foam, since the cruel bit had chafed her tender mouth, dappled her breast. Her headlong run sunk into a measured lope, a plunging gallop, a heavy trot, an unsteady walk, a dead standstill!

With her head hanging low, she sneezed with painful effort. She was dead beat—conquered! Whirlwind leaned upon her withers to swing

his foot over her back. As he slid to the ground he found that he could scarcely stand. He was stiff and sore, and his knees trembled under his weight. It had been a pretty even thing between them, after all.

He felt a thrill of triumph and proud possession as he caressed her head and she did not resent his touch. From a little pouch, which he had tied securely to his girdle, he took some salt; and she licked it from his palm. That passed as a love token between them.

Then the transient renewal of strength waned like the flickering of a candle, and the conqueror was as limp and listless as the conquered. There on the open prairie they lay down side by side, and sunk into a deep sleep, from which Whirlwind awoke with a start. The mare had scrambled to her feet, and only the bridle-rein tied securely to her master's wrist restrained her from mad flight.

It was night. The stars twinkled and blinked in the dark blue vault, and a crescent moon flooded the prairie with soft radiance, and turned the distant snow-capped peaks into flashing silver.

The howls of coyotes (the "hunter's watchdog") the hoots of burrowing owls, the yap-yap of foxes, the "Scotch bagpipes" of wildcats, the plaintive notes of the whip-poor-wills—all that concert, typical at least to the prairie wayfarer, since it assures him of safety, was stilled.

But what were those shadowy forms which, while he looked, completed the circuit that shut him in on all sides? With a chorus of yells they charged upon him. Now let the blood of brave chiefs tell!

CHAPTER IX.

THE RED RIVAL.

SEIZED from behind in the darkness, frantic terror lent Waving Plume the strength of a young lioness; and tearing her mouth free, she uttered a shriek so shrill and eerie that it might well appeal to the superstitious fears of the old trapper.

Her unseen assailant instantly released her, and sprung back into the shadows, a flash of lightning affording her only a glimpse of Indian trappings in which she thought she recognized Whirlwind, the Delaware.

Was it he?—and was he trying to escape the consequences of an impulsive act? She did not fear him, but she did fear the Scalpless Medicine-Man's ridicule; besides she had her warning to convey; so she dashed in pursuit of her assailant.

Thus Old Hard Head found only darkness and tempest; and the rain both washed out the scent of the trail, and indisposed his dog to search with any degree of persistency.

Fleet of foot, Waving Plume kept the flying savage in sight, until at some distance from the dugout, he fell heavily to the ground.

When he rose, her hand was on his shoulder.

As he turned upon her with an ejaculation of rage, a flash of lightning revealed the same evil face that had peered at her and Whirlwind, a few hours before, over the verge of the precipice.

"Rattlesnake!" she cried, starting back in dismay.

"Yes, Rattlesnake!" he replied, defiantly.

In that moment he felt a mad impulse to drive his knife to her heart, that no one might live to say that he had been seen to run from a squaw.

In her breast a flood of queenly indignation left no room for fear.

"How dare you follow me? How dare you lay your hand upon me?—me, the child of the Red Wolf!" she cried, stamping her foot with rage.

"What sought the Kioway maiden in the lodge of the young Delaware?" was his retort, than which no Yankee could have devised a more telling counter-thrust.

The girl quailed before that question more than if he had menaced her with his knife; but a woman can always fall back upon a sort of logic that is not down in the books, though it is largely employed by debaters who find themselves in a tight fix. Ignoring the nut he gave her to crack, she cried, with intense bitterness:—

"Wretch! dog! thou creeping thing! Well are you called a snake! But, no! you should be named the Coyote—you who skulk like a coward, dragging your belly along the ground!—you who run before a squaw! Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

Her taunting laugh stung him so that, with

a rasping aspiration of concentrated fury, he started forward to seize her.

"Back!" she cried, springing from him with the agility of a panther, and drawing her knife. "I would not stain this good blade with such craven blood. Blood!—it is but cold and colorless water!"

With a mighty effort the Rattlesnake restrained the excess of his passion.

"No brave can battle with a squaw's tongue," he said. "But listen to my words; for they are wise and as unchangeable as the mountains."

"When the sun was wearily returning from the chase to his wigwam among the western peaks, I saw the daughter of the great saga more of the Kioways pillowing the head of the despised Delaware in her lap. I saw her smile upon him—"

"Liar!" interrupted the maiden, with that reckless intensity with which one repels an unpalatable truth.

But Rattlesnake persisted without pause:

"I heard her sing sweet words into his ears. He in turn took his heart from his breast and placed it in her hand. I might have slain him. I drew my arrow to the head, that its shaft might pierce his body through and through. But, no! let him not die so sweet a death. The death of a warrior is not for the Delaware—him of the nation of squaws! I spared him then that he might be food for dogs!"

"Coward!" cried the maiden, quailing with dread at the thought of how near to death her lover had come through his love for her. "You dared not strike at him! You, the vilest of worms, to attempt the life of one whom the Manitou has marked for a great chief! The rocks would cry out against you!—your own arrow would turn against yourself!"

"I spared him," persisted Rattlesnake. "I followed you. I saw the cloud with which you darkened the eyes of the Red Wolf. Wa-wa-kee-to, too, you must have bewitched with bad medicine, that she should lend herself to your deception."

"Sacrilegious viper! toad! worm!" cried Waving Plume, with a woman's ready wit. "Who has the mysterious power of Wa-wa-kee-to? And does she not love me? Would she let me suffer, when she could cure so slight a hurt with a touch of her hand—a breath from her lips! Beware that her vengeance does not fall upon one who dares to scoff at her medicine!"

As for herself, her opportunities of observation and her native shrewdness had led her to more than suspect that the old beldam's hocus-pocus had a large ingredient of bosh. But that fact was nothing to the purpose in the present discussion.

Right upon her menace, as if to enforce it, came an instantaneous blaze of lightning and crash of thunder, as if the earth at their very feet had burst asunder; and a pine at no great distance was riven from plumed top to root firm anchored in the everlasting rock.

Both were slightly stunned, Rattlesnake morally more than physically. If Wa-wa-kee-to had appeared on the spot with sibylline denunciation, it would scarcely have added to his utter rout. He forgot that the employment of the seeress's dress as a disguise was yet unexplained. And if a miraculous cure had been performed, why not announce it publicly.

But all these considerations vanished before the paralyzing evidence, that his blasphemy had exposed him to a mysterious danger, more awful than death in any of its ordinary, hence familiar, forms.

A moment he stood dazed, breathless, clutching a sapling for support; then, with knees smiting together, he hurried to the spot.

Leaving the warning of Whirlwind to some more favorable opportunity, Waving Plume lost no time in regaining her lodge, under cover of her disguise, as she had come.

In more collected moments each had assurance that the other would not betray the occurrences of that eventful night. Rattlesnake would not speak of Waving Plume's escapade, lest she should tell how he had run from a squaw, and she could not hold him up to ridicule, without explaining the circumstances under which she had witnessed his humiliation.

For days thereafter both looked out for the young Delaware, but from motives diametrically opposed.

Red Wolf paid his visit to Old Hard Head, finding the great pale-face medicine-man alone

with his dogs and performing bears; and the old trapper, returning the compliment, was entertained in solemn state in the camp of the Kioways.

One day word was brought by scouts sent out for that purpose, that a huge herd of buffaloes was in sight on the plains, and preparations were immediately completed for a grand hunt.

Besides the fleet horses ridden by the hunters, others were led forth to pack the meat to camp. Against the return, the squaws were busy making preparations for the "jerky."

In a long line, with Red Wolf at their head, the savages threaded the valleys leading out of the foothills where they were comfortably encamped, to the open plain.

A grand spectacle awaited them. As far as the eye could reach the prairie was dotted with slowly moving herds of buffalo, cropping the tender gamma grass. Here a commotion was stirred up by two undulating mountains of flesh engaging each other in battle. There another was luxuriating in a wallow. Yonder a cow was licking her offspring with maternal solicitude. On the outskirts of the herd, an old "rogue" was pawing the dirt over his back, with his head close to the ground and his eyes bloodshot with rage, bellowing defiance at a circle of gray prairie wolves, that, squat on their haunches, with lolling tongues, vibrating as they panted, varied by an occasional licking of the chops, as if their mouths watered to try conclusions with even the toughest of his tough steaks, regarded him calmly at a respectful distance.

At a signal the Indians charged. Then ensued a scene of wild confusion. With bellowings of fear and rage the huge bees ran, bobbing up and down like the waves in a chopping sea.

Mixed indiscriminately with the herd, the savages rode, guiding their trained horses with their knees, drawing their iron-tipped arrows to the head, to give them a force that would sink them deep into the quivering flesh.

Selected by their dark, almost black appearance, the index of fatness, the leviathans were dropped on every hand, dotting the plain when their living companions had swept on and away.

But the huntsmen did not escape without mementoes of that grand slaughter. Here a stumbling horse cast his rider, lucky if his neck was not broken, or the life trampled out of his body. There, out of the eddying clouds of dust, rose the shrill equine cry of pain, showing that some steed had made unwelcome acquaintance with a buffalo horn.

Red Wolf was a born hunter, who, regarding the chase as an art, clung to the traditions of his fathers. To him, in the hunt, the carbine or revolver of the white man was a butcher's weapon, just as an angler who prides himself on his reel looks upon a net as an abomination. But to leave his arrows in more carcasses than did any of his followers—ah! that was his triumph!

His tried hunter having gone lame from a slip among the rocks, he was now using a young horse that had not learned by long familiarity to respond accurately and promptly to his slightest sign.

In his headlong eagerness, which would have been recklessness in one less experienced, he suddenly found himself in a critical position. Absorbed in the pursuit of a fat cow, he did not discover, until the very last moment, an old "rogue," the most vicious of his herd, that was charging him with head down and tail in the air. His horse failed to understand the hasty pressure of his leg; he clutched at the bridle-rein; in the confusion of signs a golden moment was lost, and the catastrophe followed like a stroke of lightning.

With a scream of terror, the animal reared, pawing the air, and as the cruel horn tore open his vitals, fell over backward—indeed he was fairly hurled—and all disappeared in a cloud of dust.

In a moment the spot was deserted, the herd thundering on toward the horizon, save that the old "rogue" stood his ground, pawing up the earth and bellowing wrathfully, his tail bearing aloft its tufted end to flutter in the wind like a defiant pennant, while he waited with glaring eyes for the smoke of battle to clear, that he might once more sight the foe.

In the effort to save his horse, Red Wolf had lost the opportunity to slip from its back and save himself. He now lay half stunned on the

plain, while his horse scrambled to its feet and made off to some little distance before it fell in the agonies of death.

The bull saw the body of the man moving, in the dazed, instinctive effort to rise. For a few steps he backed away, as if to gain a better start for his terrific charge. His eyes seemed to emit flashes of light; his tail vibrated with the tense, springy motion of a steel rod; then, with a roar like a fog-horn and a shock like the fall of a ponderous steam-hammer, he plunged forward.

A moment, and the sagamore of the Kioways would be trampled to pulp!

But while in mid-air, at the crest of his second mighty bound, came a zip and a thud. The forelegs refused to sustain the mighty mass of flesh that was hurled upon them; the slime-drooling nose and blood-stained horns were rooted into the ground, and the huge carcass fell over on its side, the feathered end of an arrow whose barb was in its heart protruding just back of the foreleg.

But ere this catastrophe was complete, a horse flashed by in full career, to be pulled upon its haunches by a hand of iron; and the Rattlesnake leaped to the ground and sprung to the assistance of his chief, who was now fully awake to the peril so timely averted.

His heart swelling with the conviction that the gods had smiled upon him and brought the red-letter day of his life, Rattlesnake could not utter a word lest his tones should betray his mad exultation as he lifted the Red Wolf to his feet.

The sachem passed his hand across his forehead, as if to dispel the last lingerings of dizziness, and drew himself erect, with a return of the wonted stern brightness to his eyes. Then in a deep, calm voice he said:

"Rattlesnake has saved the life of Red Wolf. Let him ask anything within the gift of the chief of the Kioways, and it shall be his. Red Wolf has spoken!"

Not bristling with the oaths with which the despots of the Old World have from time immemorial iron-cladded their promises, even then all too little trustworthy, but crowned with the dignity of simple directness, came the pledge of the monarch of the new.

For a moment the Rattlesnake stood silent, abashed by the audacity of his own purpose. Then with the light of reckless desperation and headlong defiance of all restraint blazing in his eyes, he drew himself erect and said:

"The words of my chief have sunk deep into my heart. They are good! Rattlesnake is but a simple brave. No followers spring at his war-cry. He has been content to add a little to the long arm with which the great sagamore of the Kioways reaches his flying foes. But you know that he leads all of your young men in trials of strength and skill; on the war-path none is before him; at the council-fire when he opens his mouth he does not disgrace his tribe with childish talk; and now, on the hunting field, you have seen his arm stretched forth when no other was near. You bid him speak with a straight tongue and without fear the inmost wish of his heart?"

"Speak!" was the terse command.

And the Rattlesnake waited no further bidding.

"I love Waving Plume! I would have her sit in my lodge!"

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST SCALP.

FRIENDS or foes, it is the custom of prairie Indians to rush forward at full speed and with blood-curdling yells. The party approached, if weaker, may warn them off and demand that they reveal themselves, by waving the hand forward and back, and then from side to side, above the head.

The open palm, or the fist clinched before the forehead, declares their intentions amicable, or hostile, followed by the sign indicating their tribe—the hand drawn across the throat being the suggestive totem of the Sioux!

But for this telegraphy the young brave with the white mare had neither time nor occasion. In a situation where every moment was worth a life, he had to assume the worst and meet it with that dash which often carries a forlorn hope.

Equally menaced from all sides, the milk-white steed stood at bay, with her head thrown into the air, her eyes blazing, and a snort of terror issuing from her dilated and quivering nostrils.

With a low cry of encouragement, Whirlwind leaped upon her back and patted her neck.

The first effect of his weight was a rush of recollection; and the spirited animal gathered herself together, trembling, cowed. But, there was reassurance in his caressing touch; and the steady pressure of his knees and his ringing shout that followed instantly, inspired her with that confidence which brutes often catch from the higher intelligences.

Then came a mad charge!—yells of astonishment and fear—a flight of silent arrows—instantaneous flashes that seemed to burn holes into the night, and quick, sharp cracks, like the snapping of electric sparks—last, a shock, as several horses collided in full course.

As if to veil this scene of murderous strife, the moon was suddenly extinguished behind a dense black cloud; and there in the darkness followed a struggle of maddened and terrified brutes, all the more terrible because blind.

From the plunging, floundering mass issued a white object that sped wraith-like over the level prairie. It seemed to draw after it, as the thread from a distaff, a dark line that thinned, and even broke in places, as it lengthened.

Then yells of disappointed rage woke the sleeping echoes of the distant foothills, and eager arrows winged their bat-like flight in vain pursuit.

Twisting in his seat, the young Delaware returned his compliments by a leaden messenger; the foremost horse and rider went to the ground with a crash; and at this point the pursuing line once more gathered itself into a dark bunch, abandoning the hopeless enterprise, no doubt to give attention to a dead or disabled chief.

As the moon once more un veiled her calm, sad face, Whirlwind discovered an arrow swinging from his mare's shoulder and slatting her leg as she ran.

Instantly dismounting, he drew forth the barb and applied his lips to the wound.

"If they have poisoned thee, my Swallow, a thousand lives shall not satisfy my revenge!" was the despairing cry of his heart.

Then, heedless of the fact that he himself bled from several wounds, he remounted and urged his course into the foothills.

Here he selected a low-stalked plant, chewed its leaf into a pulp, and poulticed the wound.

After his horse, he looked to himself.

He was soon satisfied that his fears lest the arrows might be poisoned were ill-founded.

Then he set out on his return to the spot where he had captured his prize, and where his carbine, bow and arrows and blanket had been left.

The danger from which she had borne him was a new tie between him and his beautiful mare. His love for her was as strong as his pride. He could not delay the exquisite pleasure of studying her points. Her quick intelligence, her graceful execution—above all her timid dependence upon him, thrilled him and filled him with delight.

In this labor of love he was very patient and persevering; so that when, just at daybreak, they neared the camp of the night before, he had her almost perfectly under control.

An uproar of savage snarls, and the scampering in every direction of skulking objects at their approach, told a sad story.

"Poor little Cony!" was the tribute of the boy to his faithful little bronco. "Your life was given in barter for my beautiful Swallow. While she lives, I shall never forget what I owe you."

He did not go to see the bones over which the coyotes had wrangled. He was rejoiced to find that the carcass had supplied them with sufficient occupation, so that they had not torn his blanket, nor tried their teeth on his bow, arrows, carbine-stock, or lariat.

Gathering these up, he went back among the foot-hills and found a secluded spot where he could give the day to rest; save that, as the mare was bespattered from head to foot with dirt, he washed her clean and rubbed her dry before he looked to his own comfort.

"And now," he cried, as he awoke with the first streak of dawn on the following morning, "now, my father, look down upon me! To-day I take the trail on which I shall strike the first blow of vengeance for your untimely death!"

And mounting his milk-white mare, he dashed once more out on the prairie.

Several days later he struck a fresh trail, of

three iron-shod horses. Here was what he sought—the hated enemies of his people.

At once aglow with that savage ardor which afterward won him the name of The Avenger, he set out on the trail like a bloodhound.

Shortly after mid-day he found the smoldering remains of a fire. Then he followed the trail more slowly and warily until dark. At last he discovered the twinkling light of a campfire.

It was now necessary to wait until they had settled for the night.

Moreover, since danger was more likely to follow their trail than to come upon them accidentally, a special watch would be kept in that direction. Whirlwind therefore made a detour so as to get on the other side. Here an arroyo enabled him to lead his horse quite near without risking discovery.

It was not far from midnight when, leaving the mare picketed, he crept forward through the grass which was about a foot high.

His first act was to get among the horses and quietly draw their picket-pins. Then he snaked his way forward, lying flat on his belly.

Now began the risky part of his undertaking. He discovered that the fire of buffalo chips had died down to a dull glow that gave forth no illumination. On the side nearest him were two dark figures lying at length; on the further side was one in the same position. The young brave concluded that the single figure was the guard. He was probably lying on his face with his elbows far apart and his chin resting on his hands, while his eyes kept vigilant watch along the line, where the black earth met the scarcely less black sky. In this posture a guard is least exposed to any skulking foe, while he readily discerns any object silhouetted against the sky.

Holding his revolver in readiness to shoot the first man who moved, Whirlwind crept stealthily forward.

One of the two men nearest him lay on his side, the other on his face.

He knew that the latter presented the fairer mark. A single blow just below the shoulder blade would reach the heart. Then a whisk, and he would have the coveted scalp before the others were fairly warned of the danger. As noiselessly as a serpent, the Indian youth crept upon his foe. A moment his knife was poised, then descended with a dull thud. The victim uttered a groan and writhed in the death-agony.

The guard lifted his head and turned to look; then scrambled to his feet with a cry of alarm. The other sleeper awoke, but instead of rising, rolled over and over out of the way.

Meanwhile Whirlwind had made two rapid passes with his knife and torn the scalp away. Then, as the guard was rushing upon him, he fired a shot, and yelling to stampede the horses, sprung away.

In a moment he was beside Swallow, who was tugging at her lariat to join the other scampering animals.

To wrench up her pin and leap upon her back was the work of an instant; then swelling with proud triumph, he coursed away.

His first scalp was won!

But, ah! had he guessed what was to grow out of the taking of that trophy, he might have resisted that greatest temptation to one of his race; or had he known that he left behind him one man helpless from the wound he had just received and one equally unable to defend himself, being bound hand and foot, he might have returned and added two more scalps to his belt—at the expense, however, of our story.

In his ignorance, he left open the way to a tragedy even more terrible than that which he himself had committed.

Alone on the night-shrouded prairie, these two men were to engage in a struggle of unparalleled horrors.

On discovering Whirlwind, the guard had drawn both his revolvers, but the shock of the Delaware's bullet caused him to drop the one in his left hand. After rushing half a dozen steps further in pursuit he fell to the ground, having discharged three shots from the weapon yet retained.

But Whirlwind escaped unharmed, and the guard felt himself growing weaker, as his life ebbed in jets from his wound.

Thereupon he turned and deliberately fired upon the other, who lay at a little distance.

But it is high time that the reader was in-

formed who these actors were, and how they came to be in the attitude in which we find them.

It was not Sockdoliger Sam's purpose to act upon Paddy Magee's suggestion that they murder their employer and divide the spoil between them. He thought that he "saw a better thing" in faithfulness to Santa Fe Bob, not to consider the risk of incurring his resentment by treachery.

"Hold on thar, Paddy!" he cried. "No knifin' in this round, ye onderstand! Help me to disarm the cuss!"

The next instant the breath was nearly knocked out of his body, as Annesley tripped him, and fell heavily upon him.

But as Sam the Sockdoliger exerted his great strength only to hold his victim, his bear-like clasp was not broken.

There was a terrible struggle, in which the Englishman did some handsome wrestling, until, almost out of breath, Sam the Sockdoliger cried:—

"Knock him on the head with the butt of your revolver!"

The next instant Annesley saw a myriad of stars, like the bursting of a skyrocket, and then lost all consciousness.

He was then easily secured.

It was on the following night that Whirlwind made his attack.

Sam the Sockdoliger was on guard. Paddy Magee and Sir Walter lay asleep, the latter bound hand and foot, so that, as we have said, he could only roll out of danger.

We have seen Paddy Magee's career of crime ended in a violent death.

Sam the Sockdoliger, finding himself wounded and likely to be helpless in a little while deliberately turned upon the victim of his treachery, firing upon him with murderous intent.

"Hold on!" cried Annesley. "How can it help you out of difficulty, to shoot me?"

"Pardner," replied the wounded man, roughly, "I'm a goner onless I kin hold out till Bob gets back—"

"But I'll not prevent you—"

"Don't chin it so spry, if you please! I haint your book-larnin', Cap; but I'm jest fool enough to know that ef you manage to slip your bonds, you'll naterally crawl all over me. So I reckon I'd better make sure of my own bacon before you git the chainece fur to give me the grand round up. Sam the Sockdoliger ain't goin' to be bowled out by no dog-gone Johnny Bull, bet yer bottom dollar; so hyar goes!"

"Stop! stop! I tell you I will not harm you. And I'll make it an object for you, if, instead of trying to kill me, you loosen my bonds. I may be able to save your life by attending to your wound; and you shall not want for money afterward."

"That's purty good talk, Cap'," admitted Sam, the Sockdoliger; "but it don't go down. I'd rather chance bleedin' to death, than to give you a show to fit me up with a Texas necktie—oh, I smile!"

And with dogged implacability, he began to creep toward the object of his murderous intent.

The Englishman's only chance of escape was to roll over and over; and so the race of life and death began.

Sam, the Sockdoliger, was not only weak, the slightest movement caused him excruciating pain; so he soon paused, and fired a second shot.

An involuntary cry told that the bullet took effect somewhere in the body of the helpless target.

"Oh! am I to be shot like a dog, and by this scum of humanity?" was the enraged and despairing cry of the victim.

In grim silence the murderer resumed the race.

But presently he sunk exhausted on his face.

Once more he struggled to the support of his elbow, and fired his last shot. Once more a cry of pain answered his bullet. The victim writhed spasmodically, and then lay still.

With a horrible ejaculation of satisfaction, the murderer sunk upon his face and lay gasping for breath.

Presently he partially recovered his strength, drew his bowie-knife, placed it between his teeth, and began to drag himself slowly and painfully toward his human prey.

The utter stillness of the great open space was broken only by his moans of pain, sup-

pressed by that savage implacability which would not yield until his purpose was fully attained.

CHAPTER XI.

A STURDY OLD ROMAN IN A DILEMMA.

FOR a moment Red Wolf looked bewildered, incredulous of the testimony of his own senses. Then his face darkened and his eyes blazed with kindling wrath at the presumption of his subordinate. But with a mighty effort he restrained himself, and, not a word passing his compressed lips, indicated with an imperious gesture his wish to mount.

Bowing in mute submission, Rattlesnake tendered his horse.

Red Wolf as silently bounded upon the animal's back and dashed away, leaving the venturesome brave pale-lipped with uncertainty as to what the future might mete out to his temerity.

The hunters were now reassembling from all directions. The pack-horses, from which Rattlesnake proudly (because under the circumstances it was an honor, and already won him envious glances from all sides) selected a fresh mount, were brought forward; and the business of collecting the meat was begun.

Meat for jerking is cut in strips about two inches wide and three-quarters of an inch thick, an expert "fleece" being able to make them average ten feet in length. Great bundles of these strips were wrapped in the skins and slung across the backs of the pack-horses, to be transported to the Indian village.

All over the plain were skulking wolves and coyotes, with hanging heads and crouching hind-quarters, snapping and snarling, whining and licking their fangs, eager to lap a spot of blood while waiting for the more substantial feast; and the air was full of circling hawks and vultures, ready to settle upon a carcass the instant it was abandoned, soon to be sent eddying into the air with shrill screams and noisy flap and flutter by a charge of their four-footed rivals.

In the village, during the absence of the hunters the squaws had prepared the "jerking-table," a sort of wooden gridiron, four feet from the ground, and ten by thirty in extent. Furthermore, into a hollow in the rock, filled with brine, they had rolled hot stones until the liquid boiled. Into this natural caldron the strips of meat were dipped for two or three seconds, then stretched upon the jerking-table. Beneath this had been prepared trenches filled with smudge-wood, which was now ignited and kept burning slowly, so as to fill the air with smoke without heating the meat, its only purpose being to keep off the myriads of flies and other insects that swarmed in clouds, while the dry air alone sufficed to cure the beef.

In this process the whole camp participated, curs and children the most active of all, the latter as happy as mahogany cherubs, and reveling in grease from head to heel.

It was a grand holiday, a grand feast, a grand gluttony, in which, amid boisterous gaiety, everybody ate until his stomach refused to hold another mouthful; and their heavy slumbers were unbroken by the serenade of coyotes, wolves, wild-cats and panthers that environed the camp like a besieging army, and made night hideous with their discord.

Amid all the revels it was observable that Red Wolf was abstracted and morose. Rattlesnake was restless and anxious. Since his presumptuous demand, not a word, save monosyllabic greetings, had passed between him and his chief. He knew that a terrible struggle was going on in the iron-locked breast of the proud old sachem, between his regard for his pledged word and his feeling of caste. What would be the issue?

In so critical a case any rival was dangerous; and despite the depreciation natural to jealous hatred, the Rattlesnake had been impressed by Whirlwind's spirited encounter with the formidable grizzly. In that fiery nature was the making of a great chief. Add the favor of the maiden, and his removal by death seemed indispensable.

So absenting himself from the village, in the midst of its festival, he haunted the vicinity of Old Hard Head's dug-out, on the watch to shoot his enemy from ambush.

Waving Plume noted his furtive coming and going, and herself stole forth, sometimes hanging upon his trail, sometimes seeking Whirlwind on her own account. As the days passed, the suspense became almost intolerable; and

her heart was now cold with icy fear; now hot with a mad impulse to end all uncertainty and secure the safety of him she—loved or hated?—by slaying with her own hand his skulking foe.

In this mood these two met amid coverts that suggested treachery. They crossed the lances of the eye. Their mutual understanding was perfect. They passed on without the interchange of a word.

The Rattlesnake chafed under this inactivity. Whirlwind, it was plain, was not in the neighborhood. Then why not, during his absence, strike a positive blow toward the furtherance of his cause? He might win his squaw while he was waiting to remove his rival.

He intimated to Red Wolf his desire to have a "big talk."

After the solemn round of the pipe, he rose and said:

"Let the Red Wolf and you, brothers, hear the words of the Rattlesnake. The Kioways have just returned from a great hunt. Their wigwams are full of meat for food and skins for warmth, and every heart is glad. But from the hunting-grounds come no scalps, and while the braves feast and sleep, the tomahawk and scalping-knife rust. Our old men can sit and smoke in the warm sunshine without shame. Their leggins are fringed with scalps; they can count the scars of battle on their breasts; their totems are traced in the blood of their enemies where the waters of heaven cannot wash them out.

"But the hearts of our young men are hot. They burn for the joys of war. They would have trophies to hang before their lodges. How can they sing their death-chant, if they do no deeds of valor? When they are old, what scars can they show, if they spend the days of their youth and strength in idleness?

"Let our young men, then, go out on the war-path, that the Indians of the plain may not forget that there are Kioways yet ready to do battle.

"Stand forth, you who would hear your names in the wails of your enemies!"

And up from the circle, with ringing cries and a fierce brandishing of weapons, started a full score of lusty young fellows.

Here was a possible way out of his difficulties, if the Rattlesnake would accommodate him by getting killed; at any rate, a respite; yet Red Wolf looked as somber as a wooden idol, as he said, with a wave of his hand:—

"It is good! Go!"

With alacrity the young braves made their preparations. When, a few hours later, they strutted before their friends in all the glory of war, their faces and bodies were painted white, yellow, red and black, in the most hideous designs they could devise. Then they filed out of the village with great pomp.

Waving Plume scarcely knew whether to look upon the Rattlesnake's departure with relief or suspicion. Could he be going in quest of Whirlwind?

We know that he was not.

The party turned southward, the Mexican border being the most promising field. The Rattlesnake's anxiety not to abandon the field too long to this rival led him to institute forced marches. So it chanced that, while they were in motion before dawn, they heard yells and firing a little out of their path.

Rattlesnake called a halt, and for the edification of his band, embodied a bit of philosophy in a fable:

"A wolverine and a wildcat fought over a gazelle that each claimed to have killed. While they contended, a coyote stole in and carried off the prize from both. Brothers let us learn wisdom from their folly."

On and away over the plains went a running fight; but a reconnaissance proved that a small party had been left in charge of some captured camp equipage. My intelligent reader will have easily recognized Sir Walter Annesley's party.

"The Kioways are not at war with the Sioux," said Rattlesnake. "But here are only a handful—see! but four in all. If we kill them, every one, who will be left to tell their comrades, when they return, that the coyote who stole the gazelle was a Kioway? Four scalps, four horses, two pack-mules, blankets and knives and powder, and maybe fire-water! Is not such a prize worth a stout blow?"

This was said to two or three of his most trusted followers, who, with him, lay flat on their bellies in the grass, peering over a slight

swell in the prairie, to which position they had crawled like very serpents.

A low grunt of approbation was their answer.

By this time the pursuing party were far out of sight and hearing; and those left to guard the prize had their heads together over something of such absorbing interest as wholly to exclude any thought of caution. Indeed it was nothing less than a whisky-flask.

"Let us ride boldly into their camp from the direction taken by their companions," suggested one of the Kioway braves. "When they discover the ruse, it will be too late to serve them in this world."

"But if they have signals to which we could not reply?" objected the more crafty Rattlesnake. "An active fellow might have time to escape us."

Abandoning, therefore, the scheme which appealed strongly to Indian love of artifice, they had to content themselves with a tamer yet surer plan.

"Let us surround them, then creep forward, the first sign of discovery being our signal to rise and charge. Since calls are hazardous where all is so still, each must judge for himself when the cordon is complete, and then begin his advance."

So silently did the Kioways glide through the prairie grass in pursuance of this plan, and so deeply engrossed were the Sioux in their fire-water, that the attacking party was almost upon them when their first suspicions were aroused.

Then came a silent rush, like a charge of phantoms. A brief struggle, and four Sioux and one Kioway lay dead, and another Kioway seemed at his last gasp.

It was a victory that brought little joy to the conquerors. Rattlesnake was better satisfied than any of the rest. On a hasty examination the packs proved richer than was expected, for Lord Aunesley had brought the means of ransoming his cousin if he should find her.

There were all sorts of trinkets dear to the Indian heart. Here was a prize with which to propitiate Red Wolf! Its value warranted an immediate return, rather than risk its loss by attempting to carry it on a prolonged expedition in quest of further spoil.

For the wounded Kioway a litter was formed of blankets stretched between two horses led side by side.

"If the smallness of your party enables you to escape pursuit," said the Rattlesnake to the two detailed to accompany him, "carry him as easily as possible; but if pressed by the enemy separate the horses, to give them greater freedom of motion, tie him upon one, and make all speed."

The Kioway already dead was more easily disposed of, his body being secured to the back of one of the mules much as if it were a sack of potatoes.

The more valuable packs were transferred to the backs of the captured horses, as being lighter than the mules, and therefore more likely to bring the prizes successfully through the race that yet might determine their possession, if the Sioux were not thrown off that trail.

Then, there being no chance to break the trail on the yielding soil of the prairie, both parties headed for the mountains, the larger in a southwesterly direction, the smaller trending more toward home.

Albeit as arrant a rascal as ever stood in moccasins, the Rattlesnake was nobody's fool when it came to mountain craft. He was perfectly successful in throwing the pursuing Sioux off his trail.

Having persuaded his followers that, as this was their first independent expedition, a present to their chief would be a very graceful tribute; he set aside as that present the mule that was laden with the trinkets provided as a ransom.

You may well believe that this was a little more than the braves, when they gave their consent, had bargained for. But since some one must decide what the present should be, who more naturally than the leader of the party?—an argument which they vaguely felt did not quite cover the whole ground.

Next, by an ingenious scheme of distribution, he managed to assign to his own lot, and to three or four whom he held as his men, the other mule and the provisions and camp equipment which made up its burden. Afterward, by a private arrangement with these latter, he got the whole thing at his personal disposal.

The horses and trappings taken from the Sioux went to satisfy the claims of the other members of the party, a judicious allotment of fire water going far to smooth the difficulties of this rather one-sided negotiation.

Their entry into the village was triumphal. The dead Kioway was without immediate relatives, and the tribal grief for him was soon washed down with all-potent fire-water. Luckily the other survived.

With that silence which is sometimes more eloquent than words, Rattlesnake tied his two mules, to whose backs their burdens had been restored, to the post which stood in front of Red Wolf's lodge.

The chief made his acknowledgments in sullen gutturals. He was enraged at the Rattlesnake's success. Plainly this was the purchase-price for Waving Plume, usual among Indians from the groom to the relatives of the bride. Thus the Rattlesnake silently held him to his pledge.

The sturdy old Roman sequestered himself in his tent while he fought again the battle that always ended in defeat.

"It is the word of a chief!" rose across his path like a wall of adamant.

But suddenly he sprang up with a new thought, his face alight with triumph and a malignant satisfaction that was simply devilish.

"Red Wolf has spoken," he cried, "and his tongue is never crooked! The Rattlesnake shall have his squaw, but, with her, more than was in my pledge!"

Wrapping his blanket about him like a toga, his face as impassible as one of the stern old cliffs that towered around, he went immediately to Wa-wa-kee-to's lodge, where he found Waving Plume alone.

"Prepare for your wedding with the Rattlesnake. His presents are before my wigwam. Before the sun goes down you will sit in his lodge."

Her jaw dropped; her eyes dilated in an agony of amazement, the girl stared after him, as he turned on his heel and left her.

CHAPTER XII.

OLLIE'S PERIL.

THE bold stare of the rufian drove the color from Ollie Oliphant's cheek, but she demanded unflinchingly:

"What had Patricio done, that you should treat him harshly?"

"Beggin' yer pardon, ma'am," replied Santa Fe Bob, doffing his slouch hat with a swaggering bow, "I ketched the rascal eavesdroppin', an' so pitched him through the winder, thinkin' he could hear better on the inside."

"Heavesdroppin'!" roared Mr. Oliphant, with rage made savage by fear.

He knew that the peon was a favorite with Ollie. What had he heard? Would the whole scheme, upon the success of which hung his life's dearest hope, be betrayed and defeated by this miserable fellow whom he held as his slave?

With a savage oath he seized the youth by the collar and jerked him to his feet.

"Heavesdroppin', was ye?—heavesdroppin' on me?" he cried, shaking the Mexican as a dog shakes a rat.

"Oh, father!" cried Ollie, springing to the rescue. "I'm sure Patricio—"

"Silence!" roared the ranchero. "Be haff with ye! 'Ow dare you interfere, Miss Impudence?"

Abashed by this harsh reproof, the girl slowly withdrew, with hanging head, and tears springing to her eyes.

With a murmuring sound of pity and pain Mrs. Oliphant hastened to comfort the foster-child, whom she loved more tenderly than her own son.

"Heavesdroppin'!" reiterated Mr. Oliphant. "I'll learn ye to heavesdrop on me!"

The Mexico-Indian was of too servile a race to resent the rough handling he was receiving. With hanging head and trembling with dread, he was dragged out of the house, followed by Harry and Santa Fe Bob.

"Oh, mother! what are they going to do to Patricio? Don't let them harm him! Don't let them harm him!" cried the tender-hearted Ollie, clinging to the faded woman, who was indeed a broken reed for protection.

"Oh, they are going to scourge him," continued the girl, who knew that the man she had been taught to call father was a cruel master. "I can't stay and hear his cries! Let me go!—let me go!"

And tearing herself free from the feeble clasp of the woman who sought to detain her with murmurings of helpless affection, she caught up a light straw hat, and followed after the ranchero, going, however, to the stables, in a different part of the group of corrals, or cattle-pens, from that to which the captive was led.

Here she hastily saddled and mounted a little dappled mustang, that whinnied at her approach and nibbled her shoulder lovingly; and stopping her ears, that no cry of distress might come to her shrinking sense of hearing, she coursed frantically away over the prairie.

In her excitement the impulsive girl rode mile after mile, taking no thought of herself or her surroundings until her attention was attracted by the evident exhaustion of her mustang. Then she noticed that the sun was near the horizon, and awoke to the startling fact that she might be twenty miles from home, with the possibility of having her return intercepted by a party of hostile Indians.

With dismay she now discovered that she had left home, too deeply agitated to think of providing herself with any adequate means of defense. A brace of small revolvers were in the holsters attached to her saddle; but the short carbine that she usually carried—the only really serviceable weapon in the event of an actual brush with the foe—had been forgotten.

All this came to her in a flash, with such a shock that she drew her horse abruptly to a standstill.

Then she heard what in her preoccupation the noise of her own animal's movements had drowned—the regular beat of hoofs at a gallop!

With blanching lip, dilating eye and quivering nostril she looked round.

Swooping down upon her like a gull, came a milk-white steed, backed by an Indian youth with fluttering feathers in his hair, and in his hand a slender wand, to the end of which was attached a strange-looking red pennant, which was hardly a pennant either; for instead of streaming lightly, it flopped up and down with the undulating motion of the horse.

Whirlwind (the intelligent reader need scarcely be told that it was he) had proved himself worthy of his lineage of brave chiefs, and of his patron, the great pale face mediceman. He had completed his daring exploit of surprising a camp of three men, by joining the stampeded horses and securing them all, the superior fleetness of his mare making this no difficult task.

Almost bursting with triumphant anticipation of Old Hard Head's reception when he should display his prizes, and even more greatly delighted at the thought that he should be able to make so brave a showing in his negotiation with Red Wolf for the hand of his daughter, he was making all haste homeward, when he espied a woman riding unattended.

Picketing his prizes, he set out in pursuit, wondering at her preoccupation, which enabled him to almost come up with her unperceived. When at last she discovered him, he uttered a succession of yells, and spurred his mare to a dash.

"Oh, I am lost!" cried poor Ollie; and calling aloud to her jaded mustang, and lashing it with the bridle-rein, while she thumped a tattoo on its ribs with her spurless heel, she fled headlong in blind panic.

In her ears rung blood-curdling yells, calling vividly before her imagination all the horrors of Indian hostility, worse to a sensitive woman than a thousand deaths. She dared not look round and see what she knew was the truth—that the gap between her and her pursuer was rapidly closing. Her flight was without hope.

Presently she heard a swishing sound, and saw what appeared to be a shadow flit like lightning before her eyes. She thought it an arrow, and with a horrible anticipation of being pierced in the back, bent forward in her saddle with an instinctive effort to present as small a target as possible to the cruel missiles.

The next instant she felt a shock on the breast and a strain that made her fear being dragged from the saddle over the horse's crupper.

She looked down. Her arms were pinioned to her sides by the noose of a lasso!

The yells that so terrified her rung shrill with triumph. Her captor regulated the tension of the lariat so as to compel her to gradually slow the speed of her horse to avoid being pulled from his back.

Plainly he meant to secure her without injury. But as the fowler snares the bird of rare plumage.

She felt herself utterly helpless at his mercy.

A woman bred within the borders of civilization could not have supported the anguish of that moment of despair; but the wild, free life of the prairie, with its pure air and sunshine, and its health-giving activity, had made Ollie Oliphant incapable of fainting.

Nor did she utterly abandon the struggle which she felt was hopeless.

Reining in her mustang suddenly, she availed herself of the slackening of the lariat, before Whirlwind could stop and draw it taut, to lean forward and draw her right-hand revolver from its holster.

Then, disabled as she was by her elbows being held close to her sides by the bight of the lasso, she turned in her saddle with the purpose of getting in at least one shot for freedom.

But, divining her plucky purpose, Whirlwind had quickly drawn his mare upon her haunches, and whirling his carbine to the front, took lightning aim, and fired, just as her hand had carried the weapon half-way round to the rear, so that it stood out from her body at right-angles, presenting a fair enough target for an expert marksman.

The pistol was struck from her hand; and our heroine's arm tingled to the elbow. Now she was indeed helpless!

CHAPTER XIII.

A RELUCTANT BRIDE.

For a moment Waving Plume was powerless with dismay. Then, bloodless and all a-tremble with piteous affright, she rushed from her lodge, and without waiting to be bidden, lifted the flap of the chief's tepee and entered, a thing that even Wa-wa-kee-to would have presumed to do only under stress of instant need.

"Oh, what is this?" she cried, casting herself at the feet of the old chief, not unlike a devotee before a wooden idol. "You cannot mean this monstrous thing! Do you forget that I am the child of the great Red Wolf? Does the eagle mate with the buzzard? How could you withhold your hand from spurning—"

"Enough! Red Wolf has spoken!"

With her heart in her throat, with tears of frantic desperation springing to her eyes, Waving Plume still urged, with passionate energy:

"Oh! but it cannot be! I hate him! I scorn him! I despise him more than the mangy cur that is killed lest it infect its companions! Sit in his lodge? I would rather hoe corn and gather fire-wood for the meanest dog-Indian in the foot-hills, until, ceasing to eat roots and carrion, he should become a man more worthy than the Rattlesnake!"

"Kill me! See! I will die here at your feet! But let not the Rattlesnake put his loathsome coil upon me! Once he dared to touch me. Ah! had I struck him to the heart with my knife, as the spirits of the air whispered me to do, I should not have lived to this hour of misery!"

In wild abandonment she had cast herself literally at the feet of this implacable sacrificial priest. Now the womanliness of her civilized ancestry broke through the stern training of the savage; and she wept and moaned with her forehead on the ground, her pride crushed beneath the burden of despair.

If Red Wolf was touched by the suffering of his favorite, neither looks nor tones showed it. Perhaps it was as much as could be reasonably expected, that he betrayed no sign of impatience either. Had it been his wife who was guilty of this unseemly conduct (at this particular moment that faithful spouse was on the outskirts of the village, in the act of lifting to her head a bundle of sticks wherewithal to cook her lord's dinner) he would probably have given her a lesson of propriety with a stick.

Now he only said:

"Squaw talk! Much noise! No good!"

Like the knell of Fate came forth the words. The face, as stern and hard as a bronze death-mask, was devoid of all expression, save stony immovability.

The girl rose, her useless tears dried, her whole manner suddenly changed. The pride of Castile had come to her support. In her

eyes, made for but melting love or merry gayety, appeared the suppressed fierceness of a desperate purpose.

Red Wolf let her depart unquestioned. Perhaps he thought that the throes of passion in a squaw's breast were only "a tempest in a teapot," at most, and so beneath his notice.

Out into the camp the girl went, looking for only one. Many noticed her unusual air, but she heeded them not at all.

At last she spied him, affectedly indifferent, yet secretly reveling in his notoriety. He was watchful, too, for any indication of Red Wolf's purpose.

Not without a feeling of vague dread he saw Waving Plume approach, even more deeply agitated than during their passionate interview in the wilderness.

She came up to him, yet showed her contempt by standing at such a distance as to appear to hold herself aloof, and said, in a cold, monotonous tone:

"Waving Plume would speak with the Rattlesnake."

Abruptly she turned away, and leaving his astonished companions, he followed her out of the village.

When they had reached a spot where they would be neither observed nor overheard, she turned to him with the same queenly hauteur, drawing her gay blanket about her with an exclusive gesture, as if so she shut out the very air he contaminated.

"Waving Plume called me—I am here," he said, stopping at a respectful distance from her, constrained by her steady stare.

She began to speak before he was fairly done, with a contemptuous disregard, of what he was saying.

"Red Wolf has told me that the Rattlesnake has given him presents—two pack-mules, with many ornaments, and blankets, and powder—and has asked for the daughter of the great sagamore of the Kioways, to sit in his wigwam as his wife, to weave his wampum, and cook his food."

"All this is true. The tongue of the Red Wolf is not crooked. The great sagamore of the Kioways never sings lies," replied Rattlesnake respectfully; though, truth to tell, he was reflecting that the rigid course of domestic discipline he intended to administer, as soon as she was his wife, would change her manner toward him somewhat for the better.

"Yet you knew that I was the child of a great chief, and you one lost in the crowd of my father's followers."

"Rattlesnake is yet young. None are chiefs at the beginning. All must have time to show that they have the heart of fire, the arm of iron, and the head of light. Our young men followed me on the war-path. Had I not the wisdom to show them how to snatch the prize from two foes? My blow fell swift and sure; my hand held the first scalp—see! here it is—and my cunning made blind our trail, so that our enemies could not follow it. The Rattlesnake will yet be a great chief—"

She interrupted him with a frown and gesture of impatience. He was making out altogether too good a case on that count.

Her next words left no room for doubt as to her real objection to him.

"You know that I hate you as the horse hates the polecat when he snorts with disgust!"

Most men would deem that an unanswerable argument. For a moment it staggered even the Rattlesnake. His nostrils dilated; his breast heaved; his face grew dark with rage.

Presently he rallied, and replied, with the unmoved dignity so sternly cultivated by his race:

"The Rattlesnake looked only into his own heart. He saw only the love—"

But suddenly the girl seemed to take fire. She sprang close up to him, her form quivering in every nerve, her face perfectly bloodless, her eyes glittering.

"Desist!" she cried. "Withdraw your suit!—leave the child of Red Wolf free!—or, by the God of our fathers, I swear that your bridal-bed shall be your couch of death! I will plunge my knife to your heart with my own hand!"

The Rattlesnake, albeit no coward, as we know, started in involuntary alarm from the white fury that confronted him. But he quickly recovered himself, and said, with inflexible fixedness of purpose:

"Let Red Wolf decide between us."

From this second wall of stone the maiden recoiled, baffled as before.

With an inarticulate cry of concentrated rage, she rushed away.

The Rattlesnake coolly cut an iron-wood switch, about the size used to drive oxen; balanced it in his hand, tried it two or three smart lashes about the trunk of a tree, cast it from him, and walked toward the village, delivering himself of a comment as significant as it was terse:

"Good!"

Distractedly Waving Plume returned to her own lodge, casting herself, face downward, on her couch of skins.

No tame grief was hers. She clutched the furs with her hands, and even set her teeth into them, uttering cries of anguish like an animal.

Presently Wa-wa-kee-to entered.

"Ah! what storm-wind has lashed the waters of my sunny lakelet?" she cried, in the figurative language common to uncivilized people.

The despairing girl sprang to her, crouching at her feet and clasping her knees.

"Oh, save me!" she cried. "You alone have the power!"

"Peace! peace!" said the old hag, caressing the disordered hair of the maiden with a touch scarce to be looked for in one of such repulsive exterior. "The tempest passes; then comes new life and brightness. The young and foolish quail before the lightning, cry out in terror of the bellowing thunder, and believe that the heavens will fall down upon the mountains, and that there will be no more day. The old and wise, they that have heard the voice of the Manitou many times, sit calmly and wait."

"But I shall die! I shall die!" cried the distracted girl.

"Speak!" urged Wa-wa-kee-to, gently.

"My father has commanded me to prepare to sit in the lodge of the Rattlesnake. This day, ere the sun is set, he will bring it to pass! Oh! what can I tell you of this? When he is near, my heart grows cold and sick with hate, my flesh creeps with loathing, as at the clammy touch of a lizard! Oh! I cannot live! I will kill myself, before his hand shall touch me!"

"But I am so young!—all the world is so bright and gay!—I fear to lie alone in the wilderness, on the platform of the dead—still, cold, lifeless!—unable to see the light of the warm sun, or hear the glad greetings of the birds when he comes to show them their little ones again; and in the long, dark night to have the wolves prowling about, snapping their cruel fangs and leaping up, to get at me and tear my flesh! Ah! it is terrible! I shudder with dread! I am cold with fear!"

"But you will not let it be! You who are the only mother I have ever known—you cannot give me up to such a fate! I have displeased you in many things, I know. I have been gay and thoughtless, seeking my own pleasure, and not working for you as many girls work for their mothers. But I have loved you always—you will believe that. And you, who have been so kind to me, will not desert me now! Oh, do not!—oh, do not!"

Like a torrent gushed forth her frantic appeal.

The old crone shrewdly let her excitement spend itself, until her words sunk into moans. Then the seeress began to rock her body slowly to and fro, accompanying the motions with a low, crooning chant of unintelligible sounds. Gradually her movements increased and her voice rose.

Reared in an atmosphere of barbarous superstition, it could not be expected that Waving Plume would be free from it. Familiarity with Wa-wa-kee-to had dissipated much of that awe with which others regarded the old seeress; yet there were times when she was so weird that the girl was half afraid of her.

Now the oscillations of that bent old body, seeming to impart life to the spiders and bugs suspended by filaments invisible in the semigloom of the tent, the uncouth cries, and the scarce human expression of that wrinkled face with its eyes closed, thrilled the beholder with an awe that silenced her grief.

Sitting up, she watched the enchantress breathlessly. Was she weaving a spell that would secure Waving Plume's release?

The chant died away to silence, and the motion sunk to rest. Then, without opening her eyes, Wa-wa-kee-to spoke, in a tone dull and monotonous, and therefore, no doubt, sibylline:

"Waving Plume has looked upon a young brave, and her heart has flown out through her eyes."

The girl started violently at this unexpected revelation, and into her pale cheeks rushed the crimson tide of confusion.

"How did you know—"

And there she checked her unlucky admission.

As for Wa-wa-kee-to, she had heard her foster-child talking in her sleep; but it is no part of a prophetess to betray her sources of information.

Ignoring the half question, she kept on:

"He is fair to the eye—"

"Ah!" sighed the enamored maiden.

"He sings sweet words into a willing ear—"

The listener hung breathless.

"But beware! beware!—"

"Oh!" was the involuntary cry.

"He is of the people hated of the Red Wolf! He is a Delaware!"

"But he has the great heart, the strong arm of a chief!" burst forth the girl. "He is brave; he is generous. Oh! if he were here, he would free me from the loathsome coil of the Rattlesnake. There may be bad Delawares, but he is not of them, believe me. If Red Wolf saw him, knew him, he would no longer hate his people without exception."

This outburst passed unheeded, if indeed it was heard, by the seeress, who seemed to be in a sort of trance.

Ignoring it, she continued in the same tone:

"Let Waving Plume go to her bridal with the Rattlesnake without fear. Wa-wa-kee-to has spoken."

After one breathless moment of dismay at this unexpected turn in the tenor of the oracle, the maiden besieged the seeress with a clamorous protest. She might as well have appealed to an iron hitching-post. Wa-wa-kee-to sat silent and motionless.

Waving Plume was in despair. All had failed her. Her last hope had produced only a warning against Whirlwind, and a recommendation to yield docilely to her fate. At least, so she understood it.

Wa-wa-kee-to presently seemed to revive.

"Come," she said, not unkindly, yet firmly.

"Let not the Rattlesnake be put to shame by a tardy bride, nor Red Wolf be dishonored by an undutiful daughter."

Dumb, tearless, as cold as ice, Waving Plume submitted to her adornment in such simple bravery as an Indian belle has at her command.

Without was the sound of drums, assembling the whole village to the open space before Red Wolf's tepee.

Expectation was on every face.

The Rattlesnake, got up in a style that was, according to the latest imported Indian fashions, simply *gaudy*, and looking exceedingly self-conscious in spite of his affected nonchalance, was the center of attention until Waving Plume emerged from her wicke-up and stood beside her sire.

It is needless to say that she looked like anything but a happy bride.

At sight of her the Rattlesnake put on a very determined expression.

As for Red Wolf, whatever purpose lay in his stern old heart, his face was as unreadable as a blacksmith's apron.

Taken altogether, they were a remarkably somber bridal-party.

"Brothers," began the old chief, "let all hear and remember my words. When we last hunted the buffalo, the Manitou put the life of Red Wolf under the feet of an enraged old bull. The Rattlesnake stretched forth his hand and plucked that life from its peril. The Red Wolf thereupon said: 'Let the Rattlesnake speak his will, and it shall be done.' The Rattlesnake replied:—'Give me Waving Plume to sit in my lodge.'"

"Brothers, the word of a great chief is sacred. Therefore you are assembled here that all may see that Red Wolf never looks one way before his pledge, and another way after it."

He took Waving Plume's icy, nerveless hand in his, to lead her to the Rattlesnake.

The girl looked like death, and could scarcely walk.

Rattlesnake, with his teeth set and his breast swelling, could scarcely conceal his wild triumph.

The gathering thunderbolt that was in old Red Wolf's heart found no expression in his face.

"Let all the world see Red Wolf redeem his pledge!" he cried, in deep, resonant gutturals.

But at this moment came an interruption.

A bent figure, with hair trailing on the ground in front like a veil of silver, walked into the circle. A stern, high-pitched voice cried:—

"Stay!"

CHAPTER XIV.

RED-HANDED MURDER!

MEANWHILE, in the corral, the ranchero had called a lusty "cow-puncher" to his assistance, and commanded that Patricio be stripped to the waist and tied by the wrists to a tall post; and, further, that a scourge of nettles be procured—that most cruel of all forms of the lash.

As if to witness an amusing spectacle, Santa Fe Bob perched himself on the edge of a watering trough and began to kick his heels against the side, producing a peculiar liquid thud.

"I say, boss," he suggested, carelessly, rolling his quid to the other cheek, "this hyar's music while it lasts; but s'pose the skunk comes back at ye? Ef so be he's picked up any points, an' sees his way clear to split on ye, I reckon love fur the man what tickled his hide with nettles won't shut up his yawp."

"I know my business!" was Mr. Oliphant's surly reply.

"All right, boss—*a-all* right!" said Santa Fe Bob, cheerfully. "Ef you're satisfied, I hain't no call to complain. Go ahead with yer rat-killin'."

Harry Oliphant now got a chance to draw his father to one side.

"There is sense in what he suggests," he said. "Will it do any good to make the boy more bitter against us, when his fidelity to Ollie is already enough to contend against?"

"Do you take me for a fool?" growled the elder Oliphant. "D'ye think I mean to take any chances on this dog! This is a beginning; it ain't the end, by any manner of means!"

Harry looked hard at his father's lowering face, to read the significance of this dark menace; but everything being in readiness, the ranchero turned away.

Baring his brawny arm half-way to the shoulder, he grasped the nettle scourge.

"Heavesdroppin', eh?" he growled. "I'll learn ye to heavesdrop on me!"

And without further introduction, he rained a torrent of stinging blows upon the bare back of his shrinking victim.

The youth had none of the stern courage of a harder race. His screams of agony were heart-piercing, until exhaustion sunk them to gurgling moans.

Around stood herders of mingled nationalities. Those who claimed blood kindred to that of the suffering wretch looked on with eyes that glowed like living coals. Only cowardice held their murderous hate in check.

At last, panting and dripping with sweat, the ranchero threw down his scourge.

Patricio now hung limp and almost lifeless by the ligature that bound his wrists to the post higher than his head, his back a gory horror.

"Put 'im in that crib!" commanded his master, pointing to a shed near at hand.

The peon's wrists were released, and he was dragged rather than led into the shed, where he sunk upon his knees and then fell upon his face on a shake-down of dried grass that had been strewed on the ground.

"That's a lesson for the rest of you," said the ranchero, glancing around on several other peons, whom he held as veritable slaves. "Eliseo! put a bowl of water and some parched corn where 'e can get it. But no one is to speak a word to 'im, do you understand?—nor go near 'im."

"Si, senor," said Eliseo, submissively, and the others moved away in sullen silence, when their tyrannical master turned toward the house.

Santa Fe Bob got down from the watering trough, stretching his legs lazily.

"Waal, boss," he said, "that thar was a show fur sore eyes. 'Most as good as Louisianny before the war, blow me if it warn't! Greasers is next to nigs an' dogs, I'll swar! Purty show!—purty show!"

To this Mr. Oliphant made no reply, but when they had regained the house he said:

"Well, we are ready to sign the agreement you proposed."

"Two hundred dollars down—"

For reply, Mr. Oliphant tossed a bag of jingling coins on the table.

Santa Fe Bob tried to hide the gratified twinkle in his eyes. With affected carelessness he took the bag by the bottom and turned the contents—Spanish dollars—out on the table, then counted them back into the bag.

"So far, so good. Now fur the dockyment," he said.

Mr. Oliphant silently laid a paper before him.

Santa Fe Bob read it with labored effort, spelling the longer words, while Harry Oliphant regarded him with a contemptuous smile.

"Squar' as a diel!" he said at last. "Now if you gents will stick your fists to that, I reckon I'll have to chalk my mark where it won't be in the way, an' we'll git a couple o' your bull-whackers to clinch the thing. Then good-bye, John, to his lordship!"

Two herders, a Frenchman and an Irishman,

were called in to act as witnesses to the nefarious contract, which signed away Sir Walter Aunesley's life. When they were dismissed Santa Fe Bob drew from his breast a fancifully-carved wooden crucifix, black with age and devout handling.

"Fast bind, fast find," he quoted. "I reckon it won't do no hurt to let you gents swear that you won't come no bilk games on me an' my pals in this thing."

Harry Oliphant laughed aloud.

"Have you been robbing some convent?" he asked, scornfully.

"That's all right," said Santa Fe Bob, doggedly. "Jest you swear, that's all I ask of you."

"Oh, we'll swear fast enough," sneered Harry. "Make it to please yourself. If you'd like us to sign the contract in blood, now—"

"That's all right," repeated Bob; and heedless of the others' jeers he propounded an oath as devilish in its intent as it was absurd in its wording.

Harry kissed the cross with a resounding smack, to show his reckless contempt for the sanctity of both symbol and ceremony; but his father shuddered involuntarily as his lips touched the sacred emblem.

Once more repeating "That's all right, gents!" Santa Fe Bob secured his contract and his dollars in his saddle-bags, and rode away from the ranch.

Left alone, the eyes of the two rogues, father and son, sought each other, a twinkle of devilish amusement appearing in those of the younger scoundrel.

"The infernal fool!" was his comment.

Then he laughed aloud.

"I see we both 'ave the same hidee," said the father, shrewdly.

"That it would be impracticable to get rid of Sir Walter and his three stanch friends without making a noise; but, they having disposed of him, we will have ample opportunities to dispose of them in detail before the maturity of their contract?"

"Hexactly."

"But how about this fearful oath?"

And again the speaker laughed.

"—the hoath!" was Mr. Oliphant's summary disposal of that matter.

"Our friend, Patricio, then?" suggested Harry.

"Ah! that's a thing that's got to be attended to at once," said his father.

The two unscrupulous villains then put their heads together, Harry shrewd and watchful, his father eager with a tigerish ferocity.

Presently the younger man leaned back in his chair, drawing:

"Exactly. Thought I saw through your little game. Thanks for your consideration; but really you'll have to excuse me."

"What?" cried Mr. Oliphant, in a rage. "You are afraid?"

"Well, no," was the nonchalant reply, as the speaker lighted a fresh cigarette. "But you see, it isn't exactly in my line. Now, you've had more practice, you see."

Mr. Oliphant swore roundly, denouncing his son as a coward, as well as a scoundrel.

"Um, yes," acquiesced Harry, placidly, between the puffs at his cigarette. "I believe that parents are entitled to the forbearance of their children—"

"Go to the devil!" roared Mr. Oliphant. "I can do without your 'elp!'"

"Undoubtedly. I knew you could, my dear sir."

The ranchero, no match for his son's insolent banter, stamped out of the room in a towering rage.

At nightfall it was discovered that Ollie had not yet returned. Mrs. Oliphant was helpless in her misery. In her husband anxiety always found expression in anger.

The whole ranch was aroused. Not a vaquero of them all but would give his life for Miss Ollie. There was a great hurrying hither and thither of men, and the restive tramp of horses. The cattle, just corralled after their day's grazing, caught the excitement, and bellowed dismally, raising a cloud of dust, which enveloped the ranch like an ominous pall, as they surged back and forth in their pens.

All was noise and confusion.

Suddenly a shriek of terror cleft like a knife the general hubbub, followed by pistol-shots and shouts of rage.

The vaqueros, who were on the point of setting out on the search for their young mistress, urged their horses toward the scene of this unexpected strife; and soon the red flare of smoking torches lighted a terrible picture.

Around were the horsemen, with difficulty curbing their excited steeds, and holding their blood-red links above their heads.

In the center stood the ranchero, pale with fury, a pistol in his right hand, his left dripping blood.

On the ground at his feet lay the peon, Patricio, his limbs jerking spasmodically in the last throes of death.

"The young devil 'as stabbed me! 'E tried to take my life!" cried the ranchero, looking about upon his men as if to see if there were any more disaffected ones.

The herders scowled darkly. Those who were not of Spanish blood despised Patricio, and more than one muttered:

"Sarved the Greaser right!"

Prejudice blinded them to any close scrutiny. If any of Patricio's fellow-peons doubted the surface appearance of that dark tragedy, they kept their gloomy suspicions close-locked in their own breasts.

Harry Oliphant closed one eye when he had his father in the house dressing his wound, which was a real one—a knife-thrust in the forearm.

"Gov'nor," he said, "you missed your calling when you was young. You should have gone on the stage. Perhaps, however, you'll yet end on a stage—with a drop in it!"

Twenty minutes later a body of horsemen were sweeping across the prairie, led by trackers on foot, who were following by torchlight the trail left by Ollie's dappled mustang.

Then out from the ranch crept a girl, whose dusk complexion and black braided hair marked her a peon. She was wild-eyed, with a woe beyond words. With a cry like that of a wounded animal, she cast herself upon the body of the wronged Patricio. So, with her arms clasp him, her face resting against his, she lay without sound or motion.

Would a time of reaction come? Would this bronze statue yet glow to molten heat with the fires of a deadly hate, extinguishable only in blood?

If so, then let the ruthless ranchero beware! The worm trodden upon oft stings the heel that crushes it!

CHAPTER XV.

THE RATTLESNAKE BALKED.

WITH a cry of wild hope and supplication, Waving Plume tore her hand from her sire's clasp, and rushed and fell at the feet of her foster-mother, clinging to her fantastic robe as a maiden of mediæval Europe might have clung to the altar-cloth for protection from the rapacious hand of some unscrupulous bandit baron.

Not lifting her bowed head, but holding aloft one of her twisted, serpent-like canes, the old seeress cried again:

"Stay! Let this ceremony go no further!"

Rattlesnake stood aghast with blended rage and fear. He had not forgotten the lightning-riven pine.

Red Wolf's face darkened with displeasure. He ill brooked interference; and Waving Plume's unmistakable revolt had brought him to open shame.

"What means this?" he cried. "Shall not a great chief redeem his word?"

"What chief is greater than the Manitou?" was Wa-wa-kee-to's stern rebuke.

Red Wolf bowed his haughty front in token of submission.

"Let the Manitou speak through Wa-wa-kee-to, his servant," he said.

"The Manitou does not require of Red Wolf that he break his word. Who hates the crooked tongue so bitterly as he that lives behind the sun?"

"Good! Whoever walks where his light falls will never stray from the straight trail."

"What was Red Wolf's pledge?" demanded the seeress, abruptly.

"That he would grant any wish of the Rattlesnake that lay within his power."

"And what did the Rattlesnake demand?"

"That Waving Plume should sit in his lodge."

"Yesterday?"

"No."

"To-day?"

"No."

"To-morrow?"

"On no fixed day."

"Good! We can wait."

At this firm announcement, the people, who had watched and listened in breathless awe, drew a profound sigh of relief. All knew now that Waving Plume was a reluctant bride—a sacrifice to her father's honor; and all sympathized with the universal favorite.

Waving Plume's gratitude for even a respite found expression in sobs, her face being buried in her foster-mother's blanket.

Remember that Indian stolidity does not come easily to warm Spanish blood.

But hard-headed old Red Wolf saw at once the fallacy of this style of argument.

It was an evasion, pure and simple.

Rattlesnake's demand implied possession within a reasonable time; and the tender and acceptance of his presents were a virtual fixing of that time.

Besides, old Red Wolf knew what he was about. He had marked out his own line of action, and wanted the thing over and done with. He felt humiliated at having been caught in the trap of Rattlesnake's audacity, and was burning to show him and all the world that, rather than try any of his tricks on such an old buck, this presumptuous young dandy might better have locked horns with the very devil himself.

"But when Red Wolf's life lay between two bounds of the roe, the Rattlesnake did not delay," he objected. "The honor of Red Wolf

now lies where his life then lay. While we palter with idle talk it may perish."

The Rattlesnake had thus far remained silent; but he now saw an opportunity to speak two words for himself, while couching a compliment in the one for his chief. With an oratorical flourish he therefore cried:

"Who so just as Red Wolf, the great sagamore of the Kioways? With him, the arrow is not lost between the quiver and the bow."

As for Wa-wa-kee-to, she understood perfectly well that the oracle which blooms in the twilight of mysticism, wilts and dies in the broad glare of reason; so, declining to argue the matter with the chief, she shook her stick at the trumpeter of his own audacity, and said:

"Let the Rattlesnake restrain his impatience. In his good time the Manitou will send one who will contest with the Kioway brave for the coveted prize!"

We may observe, in passing, that this prediction was mere guess-work on the part of the seeress. She had seen Whirlwind, and assumed that one of his make-up would not fail to claim his lady-love, even across the barrier of feud. In any event, she ran no risk, since she fixed no time, and if her prophecy was questioned she could always say that its fulfillment lay in the future. Finally, if Whirlwind failed, some one else would soon bid for the charms of one so beautiful as Waving Plume.

Now, nothing clinches an argument like prompt action. So, waiting for no further discussion, Wa-wa-kee-to took the girl by the hand and hobbled out of the circle with her, the crowd parting so as to leave a broad path through their midst to her tepee.

Amid the awed hush of the multitude, the flap of that mystic lodge hid them from view. Then all turned once more to their chief.

Red Wolf stood with his eyes on the ground, his brows knit by a frown of gloomy meditation. When he spoke his voice had in it the ominous rumble of distant thunder.

"The Manitou has spoken. All have heard his words. Before his will Red Wolf is as the dead leaf that lies where the winds lodge it. Let not the Rattlesnake reproach the chief that it has not been done according to his pledge. Red Wolf has spoken!"

Called upon for some acknowledgment, the Rattlesnake replied:

"It is good. The words of Red Wolf go straight as an arrow to its mark. All must bow before the Manitou. Let us wait his pleasure."

But though his words were complaisant, his heart was full of bitter wrath. Soon he was to have an opportunity to vent it to the full!

In the seclusion of their own tent Waving Plume fell upon the neck of her foster-mother.

"Ah, you have saved me!" she cried, with a flood of tears. "Never shall the fountain of my gratitude be dried!"

And with the fair young head pillowed on her shriveled breast, and her palsied fingers threading the soft, silken, disordered tresses, old Wa-wa-kee-to's wrinkled face took on an expression of peace that made it pleasant to look upon, if indeed far from beautiful.

But now arose without a great commotion, cries and the furious barking and yelping of dogs, the clatter of horses' hoofs and the pell-mell rush of the multitude, and above all the sharp reports of rapidly exploded firearms.

Waving Plume started up with a look of alarm.

"Ah, what new peril is this?" she cried.

"Surely the Rattlesnake cannot have resorted to open rebellion?"

"Peace, child!" admonished the old beldam.

"The lodge of Wa-wa-kee-to is sacred. No harm can reach you here. Not even the Rattlesnake will dare the mystic power of the medicine-squaw."

But not satisfied by this assurance, the girl lifted the lodge flap and peered forth.

Instantly she dropped it again with an involuntary cry. But it was a cry of wonder and delight. Then from chin to temple her pale face was suffused with a blush of deep crimson.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LUCKY ESCAPE.

WHIRLWIND instantly put his milk-white mare again in motion, and using the length of his lariat as a radius, circled round and round his captive, showing off his wild graces in horsemanship, while he still sought to inspire terror by shrill yells and the fierce expression of his face.

When he had satisfied his Indian vanity with this empty show, he rode up to his captive and drew rein just in front of her, while he inspected her with an eye in which admiration blended with triumph.

But Ollie, as she gazed at him, could only shudder. She now saw that what at a distance had borne some resemblance to a pennant was a fresh scalp tied to a ramrod. The hair was red. Indeed it was the carrotty thatch late gracing Paddy Magee's unlucky "wig-block."

"Ugh! good!" was Whirlwind's indorsement, his black eyes flashing with an eloquent fire.

He grinned with an open good-nature that suggested that his late fierce demonstrations consisted largely of Indian bunkum rather than of any very marked hostility.

Gathering hope from this and from his youth, Ollie burst into an appeal to his better feelings:

"Oh, you do not mean to make me a prisoner?—you cannot be so cruel!" she cried, extending her hands to him as best she could, still hampered by the lariat. "I see you are not in war-paint. Perhaps you are friendly with the whites, and have only wished to frighten me—"

The reply with which he interrupted her was horribly significant, though he grinned as cheerfully as ever. He quietly lifted into view the fresh scalp he had taken.

"Oh, but you are young. You must have some pity to be touched. Your heart cannot yet be utterly hardened. You have not the recollection of bitter wrongs in the past—"

A scowl that made his eyes round and glaring and drew his lip quivering back from his teeth caused her to stop with a gasp. She saw that she had unluckily hit upon the very thing she should have avoided.

But her brave heart—so weak but a few hours since in the presence of poor Patricio's suffering—did not now fail. Her courage was equal to her tender pity, and her wit did not fall short of either.

"But does a brave chief war upon women?" she asked, eagerly, returning to the attack by a skillful flank movement. "You may have sisters not older than I; or there may be some girl of your tribe whom you love. Oh, for their sakes—for *her* sake," seeing that she had now really hit the mark, as was indicated by the return of the smile as abruptly as it had given place to the frown—"for *her* sake have pity on me! Let me go back to those I love—to those whose hearts would be as sad, if I did not return, as yours would be if you—"

But here Whirlwind took her breath away with an interruption as startling as it was unexpected.

"How would you like to be my squaw?" he demanded, in English, the fluency and purity of which surprised her almost into forgetfulness of which this abrupt proposal might portend.

The thought of putting any one, even so beautiful a girl as Ollie undeniably was, in the place of his peerless Waving Plume, tickled Whirlwind's fancy; and he burst into a loud laugh, as soon as the words were cut of his mouth.

But of course Ollie could not read his thoughts. He acted—above all, he *talked* so unlike any Indian she had ever seen before, that a new thought began to penetrate her puzzled brain.

Could this be a white man masquerading to frighten her? Surely not one of her father's vaqueros. She knew them all. They were, every man Jack of them, in love with her, in that worshipful fashion with which rough fellows look upon a beautiful and kindly girl, who seems as far out of their reach as a star; and one and all would have laid down their lives for her.

Could it be some stranger?

"Who are you?" she asked, bending forward with an expectant scrutiny, trying to penetrate the disguise, if there was one.

"I am Whirlwind!" he cried, with the pompous boastfulness which a savage does not disdain, though his civilized brother thinks it unworthy a brave man to blow his own trumpet. "I have met and conquered, single-handed, the dreaded cinnamon bear, the king of the mountain. He could slay an ox with one stroke of his paw. But see! here are his claws. A squaw, the most beautiful the sun ever shone upon, and whose whole body was not so large as a single haunch of the monster, strung them without fear and placed them about my neck."

"But look again. Is not this the scalp of one of your people? There were three in the party. I, alone, crept into their camp and tore my trophy from the head of the bravest. I am a great braver! The Red Wolf will not deny me his child when he sees that I shall steal many horses from the white man, and bring many prizes to the scalp-dance. Ah! none so beautiful as Waving Plume—none so brave as Whirlwind!"

It would be easy to leave unrecorded such words and deeds of our savage hero as are not in keeping with our notions of right and propriety. Many of the great men of history are made in this way. But I believe that my boy readers would prefer to know Whirlwind just as he was, remembering that his vices, like his virtues, were such as belong to his race.

In all his rodomontade, there was but one point of interest to Ollie. Her words revealed it.

"Waving Plume! Then you love her?"

"As the flower loves the dell!—as birds love the sunshine!—as the pebble loves the water that sings to it!"

"Suppose some great chief were to take her prisoner, and carry her where you would never see her again?"

"Ah! I would kill him!" cried the Indian youth, the very thought rousing his wild pas-

sions to lava heat. "I would hang his scalp to my girdle! I would leave his body as food for coyotes and buzzards! I would throw his heart to my dog!"

"But she?" persisted Ollie, shuddering at the spectacle of his vivid pantomime made almost real. "Would not her heart break, torn from her people—from all that she loved—never to see you again?"

As she spoke, Ollie clasped her hands over her bosom, tears streamed down her cheek, her voice took on the melancholy cadence of a maiden languishing in hopeless captivity. No born actress could have produced a more dramatic effect than she did without art, because her whole heart, her every hope, was in this appeal.

Before the sensitive imagination of the child of nature she made to stand forth in strong colors the spectacle of the woman he loved, torn and heart-broken. Drawing his shoulders together like one who shrinks from pain, he uttered a cry of keen distress.

"No! no! it must not be!" he cried.

"Ah! you have pity!" cried the girl. "You will not bring this fate upon me! You will not prevent me from going back to those I love!"

"Go! go!" cried the Indian, as if her going at once would relieve his pain.

You may believe she did not give him time to reconsider the matter.

But he, too, fled the spot, directing his course toward the mountains, as if afraid that some calamity would befall his love in his absence.

He was far out of sight, and the sun had sunk below the horizon, bringing the short twilight of the prairie, when Ollie's heart was brought into her mouth by discovering a dark object lying on the prairie, a little out of her path.

Should she go toward it, or fly from it? It might be only a dead animal. It might be—Ah! her wildly-palpating heart told her that it was the body of a man!

Was it the victim of the savage she had just escaped? If she drew near would she be shocked by the sight of a gory horror—a head reft of its scalp!

Her mustang snorted and reared, as she had before seen brutes manifest their repugnance toward any dead object.

With her eyes fixed upon this, like one fascinated, she, urged by a power that mastered her shrinking will, urged the trembling animal forward.

It was a man. He lay upon his face motionless—ominously still! But his fair Saxon hair had not been molested.

No longer mistress of her own actions, the horrified girl dismounted, took the inert body by the shoulder, and turned its face to the light.

Then from the level prairie rose a cry that seemed instantly smothered, so quickly, in the absence of echoes, was it swallowed up by the vast space.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CRIMSON HORROR!

SANTA FE BOB rode straight to a place of appointment with his fellow-murderers, Sam, the Sockdoliger, and Paddy Magee.

Upon nearing the place of rendezvous, he saw the air full of birds, and beneath the spot where they circled a lot of wolves that were loitering about a spot where a loathsome feast had been completed. Some were still worrying disjointed bones from which the flesh had been cleaned to the last shred; some were nosing about for some overlooked spot of blood to lap; most sat on their haunches, licking their fangs, with an occasional gape which showed the jagged double row of ivory.

"Faugh!" uttered Santa Fe Bob, pulling up at a distance. "Some carrion! But where are the boys? They ought to be here by this time!"

With an oath at their dilatoriness, he made a detour around the disgusting spot, and bore away to the southward.

After a hard ride, he came to a creek, where search discovered traces of a temporary halt.

"They have been here," he said, with a puzzled frown. "Then where have they gone to?"

Following the trail, which led from the creek, he retraversed almost the identical route he had come, and returned to the spot not even yet wholly deserted by the wolves and vultures.

"They must have lost one of their horses," he mused.

Then suddenly he started with a shudder.

The skeleton of a horse could not be utterly demolished. The ribs would still stand high enough from the plain to be clearly made out from where he had once more pulled up.

With a sudden pallor, he urged his reluctant horse forward, dispersing the wolves and vultures.

On the ground lay a lot of bones, scattered over a wide space, just where the struggling beasts had dragged them.

They were human remains!

"My God!" cried Santa Fe Bob. "The devil's been to pay here! That must be one of the boys, for the trail leads directly to this spot. But which?"

"Whoever it is, he must have been dead before the wolves went for his carcass. Therefore

they must have had trouble of some sort—a brush with Indians, or a row among themselves."

Making a wide circuit about the spot, he found the trails of the horses leading away at full gallop.

"They were either stampeded or ridden away for dear life," he said, reading the signs.

A moment later he exclaimed:

"Ah! here is a fourth horse—and unshod! He may have been backed by an Indian. But it would take a pretty wide-awake leather-face to get away with the boys. And what savage would have the pluck to attack single-handed a party of three!"

Later he came to a trail made by a man on foot.

"And running at full speed!" he exclaimed. "And the boot-heels show that this at least was made by a white man. Then the horses were stampeded. By glory! there's been fun here!"

Still pursuing the circuit, he came to another trail, made on foot and at full speed. This fugitive also wore boots.

"Two run away, and one dead yonder," said Bob, with a shudder. "But why—why?" with gathering impatience at his inability to make out the indications so as to explain all their peculiarities. "Two could not run after one Indian in different directions, and two certainly wouldn't run away from him. Blowed if it don't stump my head-piece!"

The only way, seemingly, to reach any conclusion was to follow one of the trails until he found its maker, and learn from him.

"If that's anything snide about this!" he muttered, with gathering suspicion, as he rode along one of the trails. "But how can that be? If the boys had made it up to shake me, they'd 'a' rode away on their horses. Hang the whole business!"

And he ceased trying to puzzle it out.

Mile after mile he rode, and as he stopped occasionally to examine the trail more closely his excitement and bewilderment increased.

"My God! what can it all mean? The man, whoever he is, has run all this distance! He must have been as crazy as a Bedlamite! No man in his senses could stand such a strain. What in Cain can it mean, anyway?"

Afar in the sky, on the rim of the horizon, he saw dark specks floating.

He started, with an ejaculation of horror.

"What! more of that devilish work? I have it! The man who made this track was pursued by wolves! But how could he keep ahead of them so long! The devil is in it all! No sooner am I out of the woods than I tumble into a bog of some sort. However, yonder is my only hope of solution of this infernal riddle."

And putting his horse at full speed, he dashed straight for the spot beneath the circling vultures.

As he drew near, the sounds of a terrible conflict greeted his ear.

He saw a pack of prairie wolves wrangling savagely in a confused knot.

Yelling at the top of his voice, and firing off his revolver as rapidly as he could make the hammer rise and fall, he dashed in upon them.

The wolves scattered in every direction with fierce yelps. The vultures wheeled screaming to greater heights.

Santa Fe Bob leaped to the ground, with difficulty restraining his snorting horse until he could picket him.

Then, shivering with horror, he turned.

At his feet lay a gory mass—tattered rags and torn flesh. Covered with blood, the man was disfigured beyond recognition!

At a distance the wolves still skulked, waiting to renew their interrupted feast. On high the loathsome birds yet wheeled and screamed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE WOLF'S DEN.

WITH iron implacability Sam the Sockdoliger dragged himself forward until he reached the motionless form of the man bound hand and foot.

"Sockin' this hyer knife six inches into yer carkage will make all sure, if so be I lose my grip before Bob gits back," he said; and steady-ing himself, he raised the murderous bowie.

A moment—

But, stay! Sir Walter Annesley suddenly gathers his feet up and shoots them forth with a force that, striking his would-be assassin full in the breast, hurls him backward several feet away.

Sockdoliger Sam lay motionless.

Cunning had saved the life which seemed hopelessly lost.

Annesley now rolled over on his face, gathered his knees under him, and raised to a kneeling posture. Then by an effort familiar to a gymnast he got upon his feet.

He next began to jump about, searching in the grass for the knife which had been hurled from Sam the Sockdoliger's hand by the force of the blow which stunned him.

Presently his foot came in contact with it.

Lying down once more, he got the knife in his hand, and after much painful effort, weakened as he was by the loss of blood, at last succeeded

in severing the ligatures that bound his feet; but when he came to reverse the operation, to release his wrists, he failed utterly.

Again and again he sunk exhausted, until he feared to persist longer. If he were to lose consciousness, Sockdoliger Sam might revive and dispatch him in his helplessness; or Santa Fe Bob might return, when all hope would be over.

With this fear upon him he rose to his feet and staggered away from the accursed spot. Better to starve or become a prey to wild beasts or scarcely less wild savages than to stay to be murdered by his treacherous guides.

He never could recall what followed, save a sensation of dazzling light, and an intense heat that burned into his brain. The fact was that, after wandering in delirium aimlessly about the prairie far into the next day, he at last sunk down and fell into an exhausted sleep; in which state Ollie Oliphant found him.

The face that the girl turned to the light was like marble in its bloodless pallor. When the blue eyes opened full upon her, she started back with a cry of fear.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed, quickly recovering her presence of mind, "what can I do to help you? You are wounded and bound! Have you escaped from the Indians? How heartlessly cruel they are!"

He gazed at her in bewilderment, not yet master of his scattered wits.

"Let me cut these cruel bonds at once," said Ollie, suiting the action to the word. "Unfortunately I have nothing to give you to drink, and there is not water within miles of here."

"You are very kind," said Walter, in a dazed, mechanical way. "I think I have a flask in my pocket, if—"

The words died on his lips, as if from weakness, and he fumbled feebly at his coat.

His wrists were cruelly lacerated and swollen, so as to render him almost helpless.

"Oh! how you must suffer!" sighed tender-hearted Ollie, scarcely able to restrain her tears, as she sought and found the flask.

Then supporting his head on her arm, she held the stimulant to his tremulous lips.

He drank eagerly. The effect was magical. His strong constitution responded to the potent liquor.

"Ah! you give me new life!" he said, turning an already brightening eye full upon her face, an expression of kindling admiration mingling with his gratitude.

The girl felt her heart flutter as it had never done before.

"Can you get up and mount my mustang?" she asked, to cover her confusion; for already she felt that the master of her destiny lay there with his head pillowed on her breast. "It will be a wretchedly long ride in your weakened state; but if you can only bear up, you shall have every attention. I will nurse you with my own hand."

"That hope will surely sustain me," said the Englishman, with his natural gallantry.

Ollie blushed divinely.

It was no easy task; but finally he was mounted, and they set out toward the distant ranch, Ollie walked with the springy grace of a young fawn.

Walter protested that it was a shame, for a great fellow like him to ride while she went on foot; but she assured him that a jaunt of twenty miles would only be a pleasure ramble for her; and her perfect symmetry of form and the health that glowed in her cheeks and sparkled in her clear eyes seemed to confirm her words.

Sir Walter Annesley, among other accomplishments, was an artist of no mean pretensions. He had studied not only the masterpieces of antiquity, but living models, until he knew the human anatomy by heart. His practiced eye saw in this wild prairie flower, undisguised by her simple dress, a matchless specimen of God's handiwork. And her innocent frankness, toned by sweet maidenly modesty, showed that the jewel within was worthy of its beautiful casket.

"Ah! if my cousin has developed into something like this," he thought, "she will be an acquisition worth going to the world's end to find!"

To beguile the way, he told of his treacherous guides.

Ollie started. In the gathering gloom of nightfall he did not observe the sudden pallor that overspread her face.

"Santa Fe Bob!" she repeated, recalling the fact that she had heard her father's brigandish-looking guest say:

"If it ain't so, gents, just call Santa Fe Bob a liar!"

"Can you describe him?" she asked, trying to steady her voice.

Walter Annesley complied, adding:

"But why do you ask? It can't be that you are favored with the acquaintance of such a cherub!"

"Oh, no!—I do not know him," said Ollie, hastily.

Within herself she reflected:

"And this man was in close consultation with my father; and Patricio has been brutally

punished on a suspicion of listening. What can it mean?"

A cold shiver of vague suspicion ran through her. Even the reverence due from child to parent could not blind her to the fact that the man she had been taught to call father was cruel and not overscrupulous. However, the impulse that led her to change the subject of conversation was not a definite one. She did not yet associate her father with the plot against Sir Walter's life.

While she directed their course by the twinkling stars, Annesley found a congenial theme in learning of her life so different from that of the women with whom he had previously been acquainted.

It was near midnight when they discovered lights in the distance. At first alarmed, Ollie made efforts to escape; but soon satisfied that it was her friends, she joined them.

The rejoicing of the vaqueros was undisguised. Harry Oliphant's manner was all that could be expected from a brother. Mr. Oliphant showed a disposition to scold his daughter, and received her companion with rather churlish hospitality. The fact was that an icy, superstitious foreboding had taken possession of him, that a power with which he could not cope was about to balk his life-work in villainy.

Mrs. Oliphant received her darling with an effusion of tears and hysterical thanksgiving for her safe restoration. Ollie was always puzzled by the remorseful tenderness of the woman whom she supposed to be her mother; but she believed that it was the effect of having her spirit broken by a tyrannical husband.

At sight of Sir Walter, Mrs. Oliphant turned as white as a corpse, her eyes stared wildly, and after a moment of breathless stupefaction, she beat the air with her hands and fell to the ground insensible.

With an oath her husband lifted her and carried her to her room. Ollie, following with a daughter's solicitude, was harshly repulsed. In dismay she stood outside the door that had been shut in her face, until Harry with readier tact than his father's led her away.

"The gov'nor's a little cut up to-day," he said. "I suppose it's the proper thing for you to see that our guest is made comfortable."

That was a cunning appeal. Busied in looking after the wants of her unknown cousin, Ollie had less time to speculate on the equally strange conduct of her supposed parents.

When Mrs. Oliphant revived, her husband was at hand to swear at her as soon as she could understand him, and to threaten her with direful vengeance if she did anything to betray the real situation to either Annesley or Ollie.

"You've been a blasted fool half your life," he said. "Now if you spoil my game by hazy of your hinf-ral nonsense, I'll cut your wizen-ed old throat for ye! Hunderstand?—you're to keep this room, sick abed, until 'e's hout o' the 'ouse."

Mrs. Oliphant hid her face in her thin hands and moaned.

Upon going to her own room, her breast filled with new and strange emotions, Ollie found a poor creature lying all in a heap on the floor, and moaning piteously.

With a cry of sympathy for the sufferer, and self-reproach that she had allowed new interests to drive Patricio from her thoughts, the generous girl sprang forward and lifted up the peon girl.

"Oh, Tita!" Ollie, "tell me all about it. What have they done to poor Patricio?"

"What have they done?" repeated the girl, sudden passion blazing out of her sorrow like lightning from the rain-drenched sky—"slain him!—shot him down like a dog and left him to rot unburied, or to feed the coyotes! Ah, Madonna Santissima! why do I live? My heart is broken!"

And tearing herself from the arms of her sympathizing mistress, the poor creature cast herself once more prostrate, clasping her hands back of her head and pressing her forehead upon the floor, in an attitude of utter despair.

"Oh! oh! oh!" moaned Ollie. "Poor Patricio! poor Tita! Take me to him at once."

Together they went out to a shed under which Tita had dragged the body of her lover, and laid it upon some straw.

She now cast herself upon it with agonized moans.

Ollie knelt down and mingled her tears with those of the peon girl. Then, in broken snatches, she learned of the tragedy.

It was the work of one she believed to be her father; yet she shuddered at thought of him, and could hardly restrain her heart from adjudging him the ruthless monster he actually was.

But suddenly Tita started back with a cry of amazement and fear.

"See! He moves! he lives! Patricio, my beloved, thou art not gone from thy heart-broken Tita!"

The moon, nearing the western horizon, shone under the shed, falling in silver effulgence on the ghastly and blood-stained body.

The limbs writhed; the features worked; then the dark eyes, now dulled by nearing death, opened.

"Some water—quick!" cried Ollie.

Tita darted away.

Our heroine knelt and took the hand of the sufferer, while her tears fell fast.

"Oh, Patricio!" she sighed, "I am truly sorry for you!"

The peon essayed to speak, but his palsied tongue refused its office. A wan smile of gratitude struggled with the pain that distorted his features.

Tita returned with water, and stood wringing her hands and panting while her young mistress held it to her lover's lips.

Patricio drank several swallows eagerly; then, after a struggle, he said:

"Let me tell you before I die. They—your father—is plotting to kill Senor Annesley. He is—is—your—Ah!"

And clutching at his breast, as if stung by a scorpion, he yielded up his life in a gasp of ex-cruciating anguish.

Thrilled to the soul with a horror that had in it more than the natural repugnance to crime, Ollie let fall the head that she had sustained on her arm, and started to her feet.

With a cry of resentment, as if this involuntary act were an abandonment, Tita cast herself upon the ground and took in her arms all that was left of what she loved most on earth.

"Heedless of this distress, Ollie hastened back to the house. Mr. Annesley's life in danger? She must guard him!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A ROGUE'S GRATITUDE.

AFTER his terrible struggle for the life of Sir Walter Annesley, Sockdoliger Sam lay unconscious for some time. By and by his eyes opened, as quietly as if from sleep. He lay on his back and looked up at the stars.

Presently he thought that he heard stealthy steps. He turned his head, without attempting to rise. He thought that he saw shadowy bodies gliding near.

Recollection had not yet awakened. He had no knowledge of his surroundings. But a moment later a long-drawn howl set his nerves to tingling.

It was echoed and re-echoed in several directions and at varying distances. Then the patter of footsteps became more rapid, accompanied by a sharp, clicking sound, as of fangs striking together. Last came a burst of savage wrangling.

A shudder of horror broke the lethargy that bound the semi-conscious listener. At that moment two gaunt bodies shot into view from opposite sides, to meet with fierce growls directly where he lay. He saw their cruel fangs; he seemed to feel their hot breath. With a yell of mortal terror, he bounded up.

The wolves leaped away, frightened off by his unearthly shriek.

At a little distance he heard a savage conflict that curdled his blood and struck with an icy chill to the very marrow of his bones.

He knew that when the morning dawned there would be nothing but smoothly polished bones by which to identify Paddy Magee!

A frenzy of terror lent him strength. He struggled to his feet and ran wildly at random.

How far he ran, whither he went, he never knew. He was haunted by a nightmare of horrors. He thought that he was pursued by a constantly augmenting pack of wolves, that kept pace with his wildest speed on either side, those nearest leaping up to clutch at his throat as he sped on! on! ever madly on!

He uttered terrible cries that rung wildly far over the prairie.

The man was insane with terror.

In that mighty travail of the soul he ran mile upon mile.

At last he fell to the ground unconscious.

When he roused once more to consciousness, it was with sharp thrills of pain—a sense of being torn.

It was no figment of the disorderd imagination now. A huge wolf had actually pounced upon him, sinking its fangs into his thigh.

Several more were following on his trail, cutting through the prairie grass like hounds in full chase.

With a yell of terror and a frantic kicking, Sam the Sockdoliger once more frightened his assailants away.

He struggled to rise; but after gaining a sitting posture and maintaining it a short time with difficulty, while he glared with bloodshot eyes at the beasts that grinned around ready to devour him, he fell back exhausted.

It was broad daylight. The sun seemed to burn into his brain like a ball of fire. The exhausted man closed his aching eyes.

Whining and barking and clicking their fangs, the wolves crept nearer.

Again his terrible cries frightened them back; and he struggled to rise, but could not.

As he lay on his back, he now saw that the sky was full of slow flapping vultures. From afar they were coming to join in this horrible carnival.

Soon they were circling and eddying on heavy wing just above his body. When the wolves receded, some one of their number would swoop down at him, to rise again with screams of fright and anger.

So the struggle kept on, the man's voice growing weaker and hoarser; the wolves narrowing their circle of retreat and increasing the frequency of their attacks, as they grew bolder; the birds diving nearer and nearer, until their beaks threatened his eyes.

At last the wolves made a charge in concert from all sides, meeting in the common center. There was an awful struggle; then the man's cries ceased.

But suddenly the beasts scatter with yelps of terror and disappointed fury.

The birds wheel high in the heavens.

The air rings with pistol-shots. A horseman dashes up, to find an unconscious man cruelly lacerated.

The new-comer is Santa Fe Bob.

Only by the tattered shreds of clothing was Sam the Sockdoliger distinguishable from his employer, or Paddy Magee.

"Then them bones back thar belonged to the Irishman or to his lordship. It won't matter much which, if thar's a thing like this at the end of that other trail," speculated Santa Fe Bob. "If ther is, my job's done, an' nobody to divy up with. That makes clear money in my pocket, by Jove!"

Notwithstanding this heartless speech, his curiosity prompted him to see if there was any life left in Sam, the Sockdoliger.

"At any rate, he can tell me how the dog-gone thing come about. It's the curiousest thing I ever see, I'm blowed!"

By means of a stimulant, Sam was resuscitated.

"My God! you've come at last!" he gasped.

"It was nearly a finisher on you, ole man; wasn't it?" said Bob, unfeelingly.

"But I ain't goin' to be called in, Bob?" whined the wretch, catching at the hope of life. "I don't feel very bad—only weak."

"Waal, pardner, I reckon the best part o' ye has gone fur to make wolf's grease. But that's nuther hyer nur thar. How in Cain did you three galoots git so low down as to let a gang o' coyotes grease the ground with ye? An' who's the man I see back yonder? When the Day o' Judgment comes, they'll have trouble fittin' his bones together, I'll swear!"

Sam, the Sockdoliger, shuddered.

"That's Paddy Magee," he said.

"Then whar's his lordship?" cried Bob, with stronger interest than in anything else thus far. "By the eternal! if you've let him give ye the slip, I'll—"

But what retaliation could he bring against the wretch before him?

"Come! out with it!" he blustered. "I reckon I've lost too much time already, by takin' the wrong trail."

Sam the Sockdoliger told in a few words what had occurred since their parting.

Santa Fe Bob swore roundly.

"Ye was asleep, blast ye!" he cried, "or no one Injun could creep up onto ye like that. Sarves ye right, all ycu've got, and more too! Any man that couldn't keep his eyes peeled for two days together, when I told ye thar was big money in it all round!"

And in high dudgeon, he turned away to mount his horse.

"But, Bob!" gasped the helpless wretch at his feet—"Bob! Ye ain't a-goin' to leave me hyer?"

"Whar in the devil else would I leave ye?" demanded the ruffian.

"But they'll come back—the wolves'll come back, Bob, an' finish me! I can't raise hand nur foot—"

"That's your lookout!"

"But, Bob!—Bob! Fur God's sake! Ye ain't a-goin' to leave me to be eat up alive—"

"The deuce ye say! I ain't eh! Waal, I reckon I ain't goin' to waste no more time on a piece of a man, while the money's runnin' out of my pocket through a hole your dog-gone carelessness put in it!"

And the monster coolly rode away.

"Bob! Bob! Oh, God! Bob! Bob! Help! help! Oh, my God! Bob! Bob! Bob! O-o-o-o! Curse you! curse you, you bloody devil! May hell rain its hottest fires on you forever and ever! Bob! Bob! For God's sake! Help! help! help! Oh, God! oh, God! Oh! oh! oh!"

Frantic and blood-curdling rose the shrieks of the abandoned wretch, ringing far out over the shuddering prairie.

The human monster, intent only on seeking the other trail, and following his other victim down to certain death, spurred away at full speed, never troubling himself to look round.

And the ravening wolves narrowed their ominous circle; and the eddying vultures once more interwove the air just above the accursed spot!

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE KIOWAY VILLAGE.

THRILLING with vague forebodings of calamity to his love which Ollie Oliphant's words had called up, Whirlwind regained his prizes, and made a bee-line for home.

The long, undulating lobe of the milk-white mare was as regular as the swaying of a pendulum. She seemed never to tire. Her wind was exhaustless. So the fleet steeds of the prairie,

like the idolized mares of Araby, traverse almost incredible distances between sun and sun.

"Old Hard Head will no longer call me a boy," reflected our hero. "Hu! ha! how he looked when he learned that I had killed so great a bear with only my knife. What will he say, then, when he sees my matchless mare and these trophies?"

"But stop! Let me not return to him until I have gained the hand of the daughter of the Red Wolf, and—who knows—perhaps a following of braves? Mare, scalp, squaw, and chieftainship—all in one expedition! A-a-h!"

There was a world of gratified vanity in that prolonged ejaculation. He was captivated by the ambitious idea.

"I will get the bearskin while Old Hard Head is away looking after his traps. Traps! Ah! how can he, so great a brave, be content to take pelts without danger when scalps and the glory of the war-path are to be had for the seeking?"

Thus ever the pursuit of the higher game makes all else seem insipid.

Whirlwind camped within half a mile of the dug-out, and, urged by a longing to see the old man, whom he loved as a father, went before daybreak and got into a tree-top, which commanded a view of the puncheon door.

Preceded by Rough-and-ready, wagging his tail and panting with exuberance of spirits, followed by the cub, whose very waddle was instinct with joy, and met by faithful Old Nick with asinine tokens of glad greeting, the old trapper came forth. But his face was sober; and he gave Old Nick his salt in an absent, mechanical way, while his glance roved wistfully out over the lake to the spot where he had last seen his *protege*.

"The boy shouldn't ought to leave the ole man sich a long spell unbeknownst as to what's happenin' to him—whether he's gittin' his ha'r lifted, ur feedin' the coyotes," he said. "But that thar's the way o' the world. The young-uns shakes the old-uns, furgittin' that thar's a heap sight o' difference between lookin' for'ards into the futur' an' looking back'ards into the past. A-a-h!" the sigh accompanied by a doleful shake of the head, "ole bones ain't young bones, an' that's a fact!"

"But," a deeper shade of anxiety coming into his eyes, "I'm almost afeard thar was somethin' in that thar screech. Ef harm comes to that thar boy, this hyar will be a powerful lonesome place, powerful lonesome! I reckon the ole man'll have to move further on, an' ten to one if he could scare up a spot that wouldn't seem ha'ted."

Whirlwind was deeply affected as he overheard this sad soliloquy. It told of the old man's love and loneliness—things that youth is prone thoughtlessly to overlook.

"Whatever comes," he said within himself, "my trail of life shall never stray from that which leads into the pass where Old Hard Head will enter into the Happy Hunting-grounds! No hand but mine shall lay his traps ready, and his gun and dog."

After the regular duties of the morning were over, Old Hard Head brought forth the skin of the cinnamon bear Whirlwind had slain, and fastened it upon the shady wall of the dug-out. Leaving Rough-and-ready to guard it from any animals that might be attracted by the smell, he set out to make the round of his traps.

When he had gone a sufficient time, Whirlwind went to the cabin, to be almost devoured by the dogs and bears in their glad welcome.

Having quieted them, his first performance was to eat everything that he could lay his hands on, after the habit of the savage, who can feast and fast by turns, fairly rivaling Dr. Tanner. Then he took down the bearskin, which was nicely seasoned, and went his way, leaving Rough-and-ready to guard the now bare wall. Old Hard Head would know who alone could take the skin without a battle royal.

When he came within sight of the Kioway camp, Whirlwind put his horses to their best speed, and firing both revolvers in the air, and yelling at the top of his lungs, from an Indian's love of startling effects, dashed among the lodges as if reckless how he put in jeopardy the lives and limbs of the children and dogs that fairly swarmed like bees on every hand. Such a scurrying and tumbling end over end to get out of the way; such a yelping, and barking, and screaming; such a rushing of old squaws, and young squaws, and middle-aged squaws, maidens, dames, and hags to the rescue!

But ignoring the alarmed and angry clamor of squaws as beneath the notice of a brave, Whirlwind drew his mare upon her haunches in the very center of the open space before Red Wolf's lodge.

The dash was brilliantly executed; and at the instant of the shock with which the mare came to a dead standstill, her fore legs braced, and her gambrels gathered under her until the hocks nearly touched the ground, while a shower of dirt flew in every direction, the rider reached the ground as lightly as a feather, and perfectly poised.

Apparently this exhibition of horsemanship was lost on the stolid, mahogany-colored chief, who saluted our hero with imperious gravity.

"Whirlwind's greeting to the great sagamore of the Kioways!" was the salute, which proved that blarney is of no particular country or people.

"The stranger is before his own lodge," was the Kioway's tender of hospitality.

Squaws, children, and curs innumerable, each vying to add most to the babel of noises, jostled for a near view, while the grave braves gathered about with paraded deliberateness.

All this was lotus to Whirlwind's vanity. The greater the commotion, the greater homage to his importance. But his face was as impassible as if ovations of this sort were an everyday experience with him.

A smoke, the indispensable preliminary to a talk, was observed with due solemnity, our novice rather over-doing the matter of dignity, like a youth with his first high hat. Then Whirlwind rose to his feet, and the braves, who, though they pretended indifference, had covertly scanned every point of the horses he had brought so boldly into their camp, and resolved that, whatever his mission, they should not go out so easily as they had come in, prepared to listen to what he had to say for himself.

The young orator began in spread-eagle style worthy of a Yankee Fourth of July oration:

"Open your ears, oh Red Wolf, chief of the Kioways, and you, bravest of the Indians of the Plains, to the talk of one younger than any other here!"

His eagle glance ran round the circle, leaping with proud fire.

"I see yet among your boys those who have counted as many summers as I. But yesterday I too was still of them. I was sporting idly in the wood, when a cry of fear called me to the rescue of Waving Plume, daughter of the mighty Red Wolf, sagamore of the Kioways, who leave their enemies only a broken trail and bones for the coyotes to pick."

At the reference to Waving Plume a superstitious thrill ran through the crowd. Right upon the heels of the old seeress's prophecy, all jumped to the conclusion that this was the champion whose coming she had foretold.

But Wa-wa-kee-to is not the first sibyl who has gleaned from a guess that worked both ways, fame that no after failures could dim!

Red Wolf was but ill pleased at the thought that this stripling might be destined to take out of his hands the punishment he had meant to mete out to the Rattlesnake's presumption. What could this boy do that would be so impressive as the bursting of his wrath? Besides, what was done by another would not redound to his fame!

As for the Rattlesnake, wholly unsuspecting from what stroke of his chief's vengeance Whirlwind had saved him, from the moment his eyes fastened upon his rival they glowed with a dull, slumberous fire, half superstitious fear, wholly deathless hate.

Whirlwind, on the lookout for rivals, marked this dark-browed brave; yet ignoring his discovery, he kept on:

"She was attacked by a huge cinnamon bear, the most ferocious of all beasts. You yourselves shall judge whether he was a plaything for papposes."

And he spread the skin on the ground, the fur side down.

"There you see the knife-thrusts through which his life escaped. Waving Plume herself will tell you that no other weapon was used. Her hand strung the necklace of claws which you see, and placed it about my neck."

Rattlesnake's eyes grew bloodshot with rage; but his clinched teeth pent in the surging lava of his jealous hate.

Old Red Wolf's eyes contracted with shrewd intelligence. He began to see that Miss Waving Plume had beguiled his wolf's ferocity with the cunning of a fox.

"From that hour," pursued our hero, undaunted by the lowering storm that menaced him, "my boyhood was forgotten. My palm wooed the haft of the scalping knife; my feet burned for the war-path; my ears strained to catch the cries of battle; my nostrils snuffed the scent of blood!"

"The spirits of the air sung in my ears in sleep, telling me that I was destined to be a great chief, and send many white coyotes skulking along the trail of death. I had no followers; I scorned to follow the lead of another; so I set out alone."

"My bronco was fit only for a boy; I lassoed the fleetest mare on the prairie!"

"Among all your horses, have you one to match her?"

"I have!" shouted the Rattlesnake, bounding to his feet as if propelled by a catapult.

Whirlwind regarded him with a quiet smile, as if observing him for the first time.

"If that is so," he replied with cool confidence, "the Kioway brave shall have the Swallow for his own, and Whirlwind will never again lift up his voice in the council."

Jealousy had goaded the Rattlesnake into a rash position; obstinacy prevented him from receding.

Before the Kioway camp stretched a plain full a mile in length, which had, apparently, at

some time in the past formed the bottom of a mountain lake.

In a few minutes the rivals sat their horses at the further side, the goal being the open space before Red Wolf's tent, where every brave, squaw, pappoose and cur in the village waited in breathless expectancy.

The signal was given. The Rattlesnake urged his horse with the frantic energy—beating of hand and heel, and goading of voice—which makes an Indian jockey look like a crazy devil.

Whirlwind rode at a canter until his rival was far in advance. From the first half-dozen bounds his practiced eye gauged the powers of the animal his mare was pitted against.

A murmur of wonder went up from the spectators. Even Rattlesnake at last looked round to see if his rival was not following.

At that moment Whirlwind bent forward with a low cry to his mare.

CHAPTER XXI.

DON GONZALES.

As soon as he secured his wife's seclusion Hank Oliphant sought his son.

"The ole thing will be balked if we har'n't careful," he said. "There's Bob as will swear we're a-tryin' to shoulder 'im hout an' do the job hourseelves. 'E's got the devil's hown temper."

"I'll guarantee to manage Bob," said Harry. "But in order to do it, I'll have to harrow up your feelings, I'm afraid."

"Ow? W'at d'ye mean?" asked Mr. Oliphant, apprehensively.

"By recalling your old brigand days."

"My hold brigand days?"

"Oh, cheese it, gov'nor!" was the filial admonition. "I wasn't born yesterday. It would take a smarter man than you to close my eye."

"Yes, children know more than their parents nowadays."

"At any rate, you ought to know enough by this time not to try to head me off. When I begin to talk, I know what I'm talking about, old man—bet yer life!"

"Well, w'at do you know about my brigand days, as you call 'em?"

"Enough to know that you have all the traps necessary to turn an Englishman into a Mexican. And that is all that is necessary to be said about it in this emergency," replied Harry, evasively.

Hank Oliphant looked at his son suspiciously. "You're the devil, I think," he said, presently.

"I'm devil enough for you, gov'nor. Salt that for reference!"

"Well, w'at's hall this about, hanyway?"

"I'll trouble you for a black wig and whiskers, a bottle of hair dye for eyebrows and lashes, a bottle of pigment with which to stain the skin, and the complete outfit for a Mexican cavalier, not forgetting hoops for the ears, rings for the fingers, a gaudy chain for the neck, and other jewelry in keeping."

"The devil you will!"

Mr. Oliphant stood aghast.

His son laughed.

"And w'ere am *Hi* to get such things?"

"Give me your keys, and you needn't trouble yourself," replied the other, coolly.

"I believe it wouldn't be the first time you've 'ad those keys!"

"I'm the son of my father," with another careless laugh.

"You'll hend on the gallows, I'll go bail!"

"Come, come, gov'nor! no left-handed compliments. Besides, we're losing time."

Scowling with vexation, for his cool son always gave him an unpleasant feeling of helplessness, Hank Oliphant led the way to a store-room that was always kept locked and the key in his pocket. Here were found all the things that Harry had enumerated, just as he had described them.

While making what he needed into a bundle to go into his saddle-bags, Harry explained his plan to his father, who approved it heartily. He was proud of his son's fertility—not the less so because it most frequently appeared in some scheme of rascality.

Between midnight and morning Harry Oliphant rode away on Santa Fe Bob's trail.

That worthy, upon leaving his pal to the tender mercies of the wolves and vultures, rode at full speed back to the scene of Paddy Magee's well-merited fate, cursing at every bound the ill-fortune that had led him to take the wrong trail.

Sir Walter escaped and apprised of the plot against him! If he did not overtake him before he had come upon others, all was lost.

He had hardly found the new trail and got well started on it when night overtook him and compelled him to stop. If the earth did not open and swallow him up that night, it was not for lack of blasphemy, but because nature pays no attention to that sin in our day.

At the first glimmer of dawn he was again following the trail with an avidity as keen as that of any wolf.

Departing some hours before the wolves had been attracted to Paddy Magee by the smell of

blood, Annesley had escaped them altogether. The trail rambled aimlessly from the point where he had become delirious. Then came the spot where Ollie had found him.

"Rescued, by —?" swore Santa Fe Bob.

Later, he came to the trail of those who had come in search of Ollie.

This was leading him straight back to Hank Oliphant's ranch, when far over the plain he discovered a horseman spurring toward him.

It was Harry Oliphant.

Santa Fe Bob's salute was a torrent of profanity—not, however, directed against the man to whom it was addressed.

"Hold on, old man," was Harry's admonition, with his usual nonchalance. "Hard words never yet mended a hole in the fence."

"But the whole thing is dished!" cried Bob, furiously. "The man has escaped, completely posted as to our little game, and fallen in with a party of not less than a score!"

"Excuse me," corrected Harry, with his love of sticking pins into others; "posted as to your little game, but knowing nothing of our complicity in it."

Santa Fe Bob stared.

"How do you know how far he is into the thing?" he demanded.

"From his own statement," said Harry, coolly.

"From his own statement?" repeated the other, more and more bewildered.

Harry laughed.

"In which he expressed a laudable intention to eat you, hide and tallow, if he ever clapped eyes on your graceful person."

"Then you have seen the galoot?"

"Oh, did I neglect to mention that fact? I should have done so at the outset."

"Look hyar, Oliphant, you have a blasted tantalizing way with you. The old man puts up with it; but, by Judas, you'll find that everybody ain't cut off o' that sample. When I'm talking business, I calculate to git the straight white article back, without no dog-gone foolishness about it! Ef you know anything about this matter, and have come to tell me, spit it out and stow yer airs and graces fur them that likes sich things. Fur one, I don't."

Here was a sudden cloud of war!

Harry Oliphant's face never changed its half-smiling expression, though Bob's flushed scarlet with annoyance.

Instead of replying at once to the blustering challenge of the other, the cool gentleman drew from his pocket a small package of cigarette-wrappers, selected one of the little squares of tissue paper, carefully sprinkled into it the appropriate quantity of Spanish tobacco and rolled and lighted it.

Santa Fe Bob watched him with a sullen glare, as he sat his horse at perfect ease.

When he had glanced at the lighted end, as if to assure himself that all was right, Harry said, in a quiet, leisurely tone:

"We all have little peculiarities of manner which are perhaps open to the criticism of our friends. I have two very strong prejudices. One is, to do about as I please; the other is, not to take kindly to correction, unless it is put in very polite shape. I don't think it would pay to quarrel with you until after your job is done, or I might make a decided effort to ram your words down your throat."

All this with no air of menace.

Its very coolness bluffed the ruder man.

"You may do as you please about it," he blustered—this much to save his own dignity. "But as you say, if that's a chance yet to put this thing through, our quarrel kin wait. Whar did you see this rooster?"

Thereupon Harry told the strange chance that had brought Annesley under the roof of his would-be-murderer.

"A-ah!" drawled Santa Fe Bob, with that intonation which indicates suspicion. "So I suppose you think, now you've got him caged, you kin sarve yer own chestnuts and freeze me out—eh?"

And his eyes contracted with a look that gave warning that this would be a dangerous game to try on.

"You're deuced cunning," sneered Harry, "but you've got something to learn yet. If it would pay us to play that hand, you would have heard from us before this. As it is, we prefer to stand by the original agreement. That is why I have troubled myself to come out here after you."

Santa Fe Bob looked keenly at the more intelligent villain, and a kind of dread that he had never before felt for living mortal slowly crept over him.

"If he had chosen to shake me out o' this thing, I'd be a dead man this minute!" he said to himself, with a chill creeping of the flesh. "He'd 'a' done it—in some devilish way that 'ud 'a' left me no manner of show. By Jehu! he's one o' these cold-blooded devils that ye kin never calculate on. I reckon I'll have to keep me eyes skinned as it is. When he gets done with me, he'll try to toss me overboard, as sure as shootin'! Waal, maybe I kin sarve him a turn one o' these fine mornin's!"

So rogues always have to stand on the defensive against each other.

"But how kin I work the thing now that he has spotted me?" he asked, aloud. "I reckon he's the devil when he's waked up. I allow I'll have to lay fur him when he leaves your place. It'll be risky, though, fur he'll keep his weather eye peeled, an' it'll be man to man."

"I've provided for all that," replied Harry. "I presume you haven't forgotten your old days in the Cordilleras?"

"Eh?"

"Bah, man! do you suppose I am my father's son without knowing your past history?"

"Waal, I suppose that's all right. But what has that to do with this hyar case?"

"Just this: I have brought you a Mexican disguise, and I suppose habit will enable you to wear it with grace."

"Oh! is that all?"

"Did you think that I was going to drag Don Jose out of his grave?"

Bob winced at this dark hint at a peculiarly atrocious crime in his past. He was white-lipped as he tried to laugh off a sense of disquiet. But the production of the disguise served as a distraction; and with a deftness that showed practice, he proceeded to transform himself into a Mexican ranchero. He then altered his voice, speaking with a strong Spanish accent; and no one would have recognized him.

"And now then," said Harry, "how about Sam and Paddy? Was Paddy killed outright?"

"And comfortably eaten up by the wolves, and his bones picked by the vultures!" laughed Santa Fe Bob, brutally.

"That disposes of him then," replied Harry, betraying no feeling. "Sam must keep out of sight—"

"He will! No fear of him. He's the most bashful snoozer you ever see!"

Harry looked inquiringly at the speaker.

"What has happened to him?"

"I left him out yonder half eat up, and with a circle of mourners waitin' to finish him. He had the impudence to want me to waste time cartin' him off and patchin' up what was left of him, and lose my chance with his lordship. You bet I didn't see it in that light!"

"What! was he alive?"

"Waal, you j-st bet he was, and a kickin' pretty tall!"

"H'm!" was Harry's only comment.

About noon he rode back to the ranch.

"Well?" asked his father, anxiously.

"To-night you may be on the lookout for Don Gonzales. By the way—looking straight into his father's eyes—he has been up to his old tricks. However, it was only a man that he left to be eaten up by the wolves, this time—a pal. We shall feel safer if such a fellow as that steps out after he has served our turn—eh?"

"H—exactly," assented Mr. Oliphant, but not without a shudder.

That night the Spanish don rode up. The first person he met was Ollie.

CHAPTER XXII.

OLLIE PLANS ESCAPE.

OLLIE OLIPHANT found herself face to face with a painful dilemma. On the one hand was a daughter's natural shrinking from denouncing her father, however guilty; on the other, the life of an innocent man. After tossing all night on a sleepless pillow, she came to this conclusion:

"If the deed were already done, it might be my duty to help my father to escape human vengeance; but to claim can require me to make myself a party to so awful a crime by remaining silent. If I can put Mr. Annesley sufficiently on his guard without exposing my father, I will do so; but if necessary, I will tell the whole truth."

Sir Walter Annesley had been charmed by his unknown cousin at first sight.

"But what is this strange restraint in her manner?" he asked himself. "It is not bashfulness. Yet she sometimes changes color and betrays agitation without any apparent cause. It is all very charming; but it is puzzling, too."

He talked to her about England, and indeed about all his world-wide wanderings; and was delighted with her eager interest. In return she sung to him, to the accompaniment of a Spanish mandolin, strange, sweet airs, for the most part her own composition, modeled after a few Spanish serenades she had learned.

"But there is something in her peculiar style of beauty that always sets me to dreaming," he reflected, when she was away from him. "Dark eyes and blonde hair. Where have I ever seen anything like it, I wonder?"

If he had but known!

As for Ollie, when she left him, it was like coming out of a dream. With a sigh she tossed her hair from her hot face, and let the wind fan it.

"He has seen many beautiful girls in his travels all round the world. He will remember me only as a murderer's daughter!"

"Buenas noches, senorita!"

Her dream was broken in upon with a rude shock. She had gone to the ranch gateway to look out over the prairie just in time to be the first to meet a Mexican caballero who at that moment rode up.

"Don Arturo Gonzalez, a service de V." was his self-introduction; and though she had not the slightest suspicion that this was Santa Fe Bob cleverly disguised, she disliked and feared him from the first.

In the role of a Mexican ranchero looking out for a favorable place to locate, he could lounge idly about Mr. Oliphant's place for several days without exciting unusual remark. He neither threw himself in Ollie's way, nor avoided her; but when they chanced to meet his piercing glances filled her with alarm and a sense of loathing.

On the second day Annesley was able to accompany his fair hostess to the flat roof of the house.

"Ah! this is elixir!" he exclaimed, drinking in deep draughts of the salubrious air. "I believe I could stand a scamper out over that lawn, even now."

"Mr. Annesley, how soon do you expect to resume your journey?"

He looked at her quickly.

She met his half-surprised, half-inquiring look innocently.

"I hardly know," he replied, laughing with just a touch of embarrassment. "I want to get on as soon as possible, to take advantage of the present peaceable condition of the Indians. But then—"

And he stopped abruptly.

"Shall you be able to travel in a week's time?" she asked, dropping her voice to a confidential pitch.

Again he looked at her, this time keenly. What was the girl aiming at? He had had trained city belles throw themselves at his head, as the saying is; but this child of nature—surely she was too unsophisticated.

"In a week's time, at latest," he replied.

"You have said nothing to—my father—or any one—about it, as yet?"

She was crimsoning, her eyes had dropped, her hands were clasped nervously, and she stammered wretchedly.

"No," he said, with a slight frown.

"I wish—could you not give the impression that you intended to stay—say two weeks or so?"

"If it would please you, Miss Oliphant, certainly," he replied, coldly.

He was more vexed and disappointed than he would have admitted even to himself.

She looked up, appealingly.

"It is for your own safety," she said, in a tone scarcely above a frightened whisper.

Sir Walter Annesley's feelings underwent an abrupt change.

"My dear Miss Oliphant!" he cried, in sudden concern, reaching out and placing his hand on her trembling ones.

"For my safety? What can you mean? What is it that distresses you?"

For she had suddenly covered her face with both hands, and burst into tears.

"Have I said or done—" he began, groping about blindly for some sufficient cause of this sudden emotion.

"Oh, no! no!" she interrupted him.

Then collecting herself with a resolute effort, she went on:

"It is very hard for me to tell you; but you are in danger in this house—not exactly in the house, but after you leave it."

Annesley looked grave enough now. He recalled stories he had heard of places in the West where travelers were murdered for their money, as in case of the Younger family. In novels he had read of beautiful girls living in these dens, and betraying their relatives, in order to warn some man to whom they had taken a fancy. Was this a parallel case in real life?

"Pray explain yourself," he said, without delaying in idle speculation.

"Your life has already been plotted against," she said. "I have reason to fear that, if you leave here openly, you will be followed, and another attempt will be made at assassination. If you could make all arrangements, as if for two weeks from now, and then, as soon as you are well enough, should slip away a few days in advance of that time, and so get a whole night's start, I would help you."

"But, Miss Oliphant, surely—"

"Do not ask me anything further. I cannot tell you," she cried with a frightened appeal that he respected.

"Let us drop the matter, then," he said, gently.

"I want to give you all the light necessary to enable you to protect yourself," she went on, hurriedly and nervously. "Do not trust any one—any one in this house—"

She was red and white by turns. Her lips quivered. She interlaced her fingers nervously. Her voice failed her, and with a sudden cry of intense distress, she dropped her face into her lap.

Annesley was deeply touched, and tried to soothe her; but, murmuring something unintelligible, she got up and left him abruptly.

"Here's an interesting situation!" cried the young Englishman. "A thousand miles beyond the borders of civilization, in the den of a fellow that cuts your throat, as being more

convenient than merely cutting your purse. But what of this girl? She must be innocent; and yet— Oh, the devil!"

And the young milord frowned with bitter pain.

"I would have sworn by her! But how does she come to know about this shabby business? Does she warn everybody in this style? And what is it that she is concealing? Telling so much, why don't she make a clean breast of it? Well, I'd rather take some chances than to urge her any further in the matter."

His coolness, after what had been told him, showed his high courage. He met his host with off-hand cordiality, betraying a lively interest in stock-raising. However, his first precaution was to provide himself with a trusty brace of revolvers.

When it came to the purchase of a horse, he selected the very best on the place.

"You know the points of a beast, I see," said Mr. Oliphant. "But, as for that one, money won't buy 'im. She's our 'Arry's 'unter."

"Indeed," was Sir Walter's ready acquiescence. "Then, of course, I wouldn't deprive Mr. Oliphant for the world, though she's a beauty, and just fills my eye."

"The gov'nor means a reasonable amount of money," said Harry, interposing with his easy assurance. "If you really fancy the mare, I might be induced to part with her."

Mr. Oliphant looked hard at his son.

"Sell this fellow the lightest pair of 'eels in our drove!" he cried, inwardly. "Oo'll be hable to catch 'im hafter that, I'd like to know?"

But Harry seemed oblivious to his father's disturbance, and soon concluded an advantageous bargain with the purchaser.

Annesley, who was watching them, reflected: "Is the son ignorant of his father's villainy; or is he the deeper rascal of the two? He has the shrewdness to make a dangerous man, if he chooses."

When later he was brought to task by his father, Harry Oliphant justified his lordship's estimate.

"Don't disturb yourself, gov'nor," he laughed. "What's to prevent the mare's going lame on the day he sets out—eh?"

"You're a deep one! It halways comes to that!" replied the father.

"Thank you!" said the son, complacently.

Meanwhile, Annesley saw less of Ollie than before she made her revelation; but she did not neglect his interests. In her hands the plot for his escape was arranged to a nicety.

At last she came to him in great suppressed agitation, and avoiding his glance, said:

"To-night we must make the attempt. I am going to resort to a very hazardous means. I must get you to help me. I suppose you can tell me just how much—I don't want to endanger any one."

With a very pale face, she held out a vial to him.

"It is laudanum," she said. "You see there is a man constantly on guard, to prevent a night surprise. It would be impossible to get away without his knowledge, unless—"

"But, Miss Oliphant—" cried Annesley, aghast. "She don't mean to murder the fellow?" flashed through his brain.

"I got it out of the medicine chest, barely escaping detection," she went on to explain, not understanding him. "I am afraid of putting in too much or too little, in my ignorance. I do not wish to cause him any permanent injury, because he is a kind-hearted fellow, with the one weakness of intemperance. I shall have no difficulty in getting him to take the wine."

"Oh!" breathed Annesley, with a sense of relief. "She means to drug the guard."

He readily told her how much to use to make Iago rival the seven sleepers.

That night, when the sounds of the ranch had quieted down, she went out to the stables, where she found the peon playing dice with a chum, whom he had thus induced to sit up for an hour, and so relieve the tedium of the watch.

"You will be sure to have my filly ready for me at daybreak, Iago?" she said.

"Ah! signorita, do I ever fail?" asked the peon, smiling in a way that cut her to the heart, when she reflected that her treachery was about to bring punishment upon him on the morrow.

"And Mr. Annesley's mare," she said, almost choking. "He is going to try her for the first time in the morning. A scamper across the prairie will give him new strength."

"All is in readiness," Iago assured her.

But she went into the stalls, as if to reassure herself.

He followed her, of course, showing her that saddles and bridles were only waiting to be adjusted to their places.

"You are always faithful, Iago," she said. "I have thought of your lonely watch to night. It is rather chilly. Here is something to keep out discomfort. If you choose, you can share it with Anselmo. He is a good fellow, too."

She thrust the flask of drugged wine into the hand of the astonished youth.

He stared after her, as she hurried away. But even had he been far shrewder than he was, how could he look with suspicion on one who

had always seemed to him but little below the Madonna. He ended by chuckling over his good luck, but with many a "caramba," assured himself that his enemy should never even smell the cork!

Perhaps an hour after midnight Sir Walter Annesley's door opened noiselessly. A moment later he held an icy-cold and tremulous little hand in his.

"God bless you, my brave girl!" he whispered. "Is everything in readiness?"

"Not a word!" she breathed; and overcome with intense emotion, she swayed, as if about to fall in a swoon.

Thinking only of the support he offered, he put his arm about her, saying:

"You are overdoing yourself—"

But she sprang away with a gasp.

As for Sir Walter, he was thrilled as never in his life before. Still he did not stop to think what that signified.

"Do not think of me!" she whispered, in a choking voice. "Come, come, and for Heaven's sake without noise!—we shall be discovered!"

He was in his stockings, with his boots slung across his shoulder. In his hand he carried a knife, the deadly significance of which gave Ollie a terrible shock, when she discovered it.

Instantly she clasped his wrist.

"Put that up! Promise me!—promise me that you will not use that weapon on either my father or brother! I know your danger; but I can't live with the blood of my own kindred on my hands! Promise me!"

Without a moment's hesitance, Sir Walter put the knife into its sheath.

"Have no further distress," he said. "I promise you, on the honor of a gentleman."

He would not break that pledge, even at the expense of his life.

The girl felt the difference between him and the men by whom she was surrounded, and with an impulse of grateful acknowledgment, which she could not control, tried to lift his hand to her lips.

He discovered her purpose in time to frustrate it, fairly blushing there in the darkness with embarrassment. But a tear—sacred to him—had fallen upon his hand.

Then she hurriedly led him out of the house.

In the clear starlight they could not escape detection, if any wakeful eyes were prying.

"Oh God! keep him safe!" breathed Ollie, within her own pure bosom.

Then like shadows they flitted across the open space to the stables.

Suddenly Ollie stopped, with a suppressed cry. They heard a footstep. Sir Walter clutched his bowie!

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DISCOMFITED RIVAL.

LIKE a meteor the mare shot forward. Never was such a rush! Three hundred yards from the goal she sped by the Rattlesnake at a pace that made his horse's wildest efforts seem like the labored gallop of a cart-horse.

At that instant our hero caught sight of Waving Plume, whom until now he had failed to discover, though his keen black eyes had searched every part of the camp for her, from the moment he reached it. He had not seen her because, at once guessing the significance of his bold entrance into her father's village with the led horses, the girl had secreted herself in her wickiup, cowering beneath her blanket, as a white girl might have thrown her apron over her head, and trembling with an emotion the nature of which my intelligent reader may surmise.

Interest in the race induced her to thrust her head through the flap of her lodge, and so gaze, wide-eyed and panting, ready to pop her head in out of sight at the slightest danger of Whirlwind's seeing her. But when it looked as if he were about to be beaten, she forgot herself and stepped clear out of the lodge. Afterward she was carried away, as were all the others, by the surprise he sprang upon them, and so forgot to take renewed precaution for concealment.

The sight of her set Whirlwind on fire. With her eye upon him, there was no deed so reckless that he would not attempt it. What could he now do to give to the race an ending which should distinguish it beyond all precedent? He wanted to show that, the Rattlesnake beaten even at the great advantage he had voluntarily given him, the milk-white mare had reserved forces wholly uncalled for by the race.

He saw a buffalo-skin hung to dry upon a pole between two saplings. It was a masterful leap for a horse that had not been taxed by a mile dash, besides the danger of the animal being frightened by the dark object flapping in the wind.

If the mare shied she would probably break her rider's neck; if she failed to clear the bar, she would probably add her own neck to his.

Moreover, there were people—men, women and children—between him and the object indicated. But Whirlwind, with that reckless disregard of life and limb, when only the common people are concerned, which usually characterizes great savage commanders (and many civil-

ized ones, too), thought that no obstacle to his whim.

"Make way! make way!" he shouted, in the Kioway dialect, and charged straight for the barrier.

Like frightened geese the endangered ones scattered with great clamor, falling over one another in heaps, and scrambling for dear life long after the danger was past.

As a swallow—the bird from which she was appropriately named—as a swallow on the wing, the mare took the leap, even Indian stoicism being unable to repress the cry of applause which the feat elicited.

A white man would have looked to his sweetheart for an approving smile. Whirlwind, being an Indian, disdained to let Waving Plume see that he had done this for her.

His first care was his mare. Dismounting, he seized the bit of smoked humanity he found nearest to hand, and swung it to the mare's back. At first the urchin uttered a yell of terror that promised well for his future war-cry; but when he realized that, instead of being whisked over the moon, or incurring some other fate terrible to young Indians, he was actually to have charge of this wonderful steed, he grinned from ear to ear, and his eyes glistened like black diamonds, as he reflected that henceforth he would be an unapproachable hero among his comrades.

Whirlwind ran no risk in intrusting his mare to the first Indian lad he could lay his hand upon. They could all ride anything that went on four feet. This particular specimen would doubtless have set off instantaneously, at a breakneck pace, with a mimic war-whoop, but that he was warned that he would be scalped and have his ears cut off if he urged the mare out of a walk.

Then, as cool as if there had been no interruption, Whirlwind returned to his address. He did not deign to look at Rattlesnake, whose rage and humiliation were like volcanic fires pent in his breast.

"Confess, oh Kioways!" he cried, with the boldness of savage eloquence, "did not the Manitou force the cry of wonder and admiration from your proud lips? Was it not his voice saying to your heart: 'This is my masterpiece?' So the great Chief of Chiefs looked on with delight, and even the sun loitered in his course through the heavens, while hour after hour, more madly than you saw her but now, the Swallow sped over the prairie in vain pursuit of her lost freedom."

"At last, exhausted both, we slept side by side, and the skulking Sioux crept up about us like prairie wolves. The Swallow leaped that human corral, and gave to Whirlwind, a prisoner else, that liberty of which he had just robbed her."

"Would not such a mare inspire her master to noble deeds, that he might not be put to shame by a dumb beast?"

"I found a fresh trail of our common enemy, the hated whites. There were three in the party, all great fighting-men, armed with the far-reaching rifle and the revolver with as many stings as the rattlesnake has rattles. Alone I crept into their camp; and, behold their horses and the scalp of their bravest!"

While Whirlwind paused to let the announcement of his prowess have its due effect, Rattlesnake broke through all the rules of Indian decorum, by muttering, sneeringly:

"A surprise, while they slept!"

"I hear an evil voice which seems to say that this was but a stroke of good fortune," said our hero, taking up the challenge promptly, yet disdaining to look at his discourteous interrupter. "You see me a stripling, with the green sap of youth yet in my muscles; but have you among you any that can surpass me in the feats demanded of a warrior? The rifle and revolver of the white man are as familiar to my hand as the bow and tomahawk that my fathers received from the hand of the Manitou—"

"Hold!" cried Rattlesnake, again starting to his feet. "I can match your boasted skill. Leave to boys the little rifle that barks like a fretful cur. A Kioway brave would scorn that white man's toy. Let a man have a gun that is full-grown."

As he spoke, he proudly displayed his own weapon, a long muzzle-loading rifle; and unable to restrain the impulse to vent the rankling chagrin of his late defeat, he added, significantly:

"Do not imagine that a good horse must needs make a worthy master!"

Whirlwind, who was too proud to bandy words, deigned no reply to this ungracious fling.

From the trunk of a slender sapling Rattlesnake cut the bark so as to make a white spot about the size of a Spanish dollar. As a stranger, he extended to Whirlwind the courtesy of the last shot. His bullet, carefully aimed, struck just within the rim of the mark, lodging in the trunk of the tree.

"Is it not thus that widows are made?" he asked, looking about upon his friends with the complacency of a braggart who is well pleased with himself.

Whirlwind made no reply, but fired, with that instantaneous aim which is the triumph of marksmanship.

Rattlesnake was the first at the target; and his yell of derisive triumph rung through the camp.

"Behold all!—our famous rifleman has missed the mark altogether! He has not even barked the tree!"

As others corroborated (or supposed that they did) this statement by an eager examination of the mark, some of the younger braves, satellites of the Rattlesnake—for he was a bully, and had his little circle of toadies—echoed his yell in chorus.

But our hero, not troubling himself to look for the effect of his shot, was coolly reloading his carbine, unmoved by their rude breach of hospitality.

"You have not even barked the tree!" repeated Rattlesnake, urging his victory home with coarse brutality.

"Ah! do you think so?" replied Whirlwind, quietly proceeding with his task.

"Is it not apparent to all?" cried Rattlesnake, with the angry bluster of a bully who, judging his adversary by himself, is prepared for, and at the same time determined not to permit, an evasion of a square acknowledgment of defeat.

"There is not the faintest scar anywhere; and the trunk is not so slender that a fair marksman need have missed it altogether."

"Perhaps the Kioway did not look in the right place. He may find traces of my bullet at the back of the target."

The sarcastic address in the third person meant that Whirlwind could not be "crowded" beyond a certain point without "kicking."

Rattlesnake looked puzzled.

"At the back of the target!" he repeated, with a scowl of sullen suspicion.

But an older brave divined Whirlwind's meaning; and upon another examination it was discovered that the second bullet had entered the hole made by the first, and had driven it on through the trunk of the sapling, both escaping at the back.

"But this is chance!" protested Rattlesnake, like an ungracious churl who concedes nothing that can in any way be questioned.

"Indeed!" smiled our hero. "But how could I, without looking, guess that Fortune had so favored me? However, if that was chance, here is some magic for you!"

And carrying his now reloaded carbine again to his shoulder, with another lightning aim he perforated the very center of the mark.

"The long-haired scouts at the forts have told him their secret. How can the poor Indian, uninstructed, learn the white man's weapon as well as he knows it himself?" growled Rattlesnake, with savage bitterness.

Whirlwind smiled with a quiet meaning that was a dagger-thrust to his fuming opponent.

"Are any of the secrets of the weapons with which he has played from childhood hidden from the Kioway?" he asked, looking into his eyes with a cool directness that was an insult.

"No, by the Manitou!" shouted Rattlesnake, who was too blind with rage to try to recede, with such grace as was still possible, from a contest in which only deeper humiliation awaited him.

Bow, tomahawk, lasso, and scalping-knife thrown at a mark—each added its ungrateful slice of humble pie, until Rattlesnake, fairly foaming at the mouth, lost all self control.

"Ah! he has the skill of the devil!" he roared. "But see! he has not the proportions of a man! Look at his hands! A squaw has bigger! He is a pretty fellow; but where is his strength? Where would he be at wrestling, running, throwing the weight—any of the sports in which the best man must be the victor? The Indian warrior must be swift and tireless on the trail, and strong in body for the struggle breast to breast, when the red blood flows and the scalping-knife is greedy for its prize!"

"Bah! our dandy should go to live with the whites in the strong war-lodges, where a squaw with her rifle may be as great a warrior as the stoutest brave!"

Whirlwind listened to this tirade with perfect self-possession. At its close he ran his eye over the form of the other, as if in speculation, and said quietly—too quietly:—

"The Kioway looks as if he might be a fleet runner."

"I can run three steps to your one!" retorted Rattlesnake, recklessly.

It chanced that running was a feat on which he especially prided himself.

The contest was immediately entered upon, Whirlwind proving at the very outset, by an astonishing burst of speed, that his superiority in this was as great as in other things. Then he deliberately stopped in mid course and picked up a twig that lay in his adversary's way. But he had in reserve, planned from the beginning, as a punishment for Rattlesnake's repeated insults, a sting even keener than this.

Rattlesnake, knowing that he was being played with, yet hung on with that dogged ferocity with which an overmatched prize-fighter persists as long as he can keep on his legs.

As they neared the goal, Whirlwind forged a little ahead, to show that he could easily win, if he chose, but within a yard of the line he again stopped, so that Rattlesnake—foaming at the mouth, his eyes protruding, the veins in his neck standing out like cords, evidence how every energy was strained to the utmost, while his face was convulsed with rage and despair at this crushing defeat—burst by him and technically won the race.

Coolly Whirlwind walked across the line and said:

"I cheerfully yield the victory to the Kioway, as a runner. He must have practiced much, and no doubt his skill will often prove of great advantage to him. *One so fleet as he can laugh at his enemies!*"

Now the bullying propensities of Rattlesnake had won him enemies who dared on occasion to brave his anger; so, though in practice the best of savages is not ashamed to wear the jewel valor mounted in a very broad setting of prudence, the suggestion that he had especially cultivated the art of running with a view to future safety, was greeted with a burst of laughter.

Goaded beyond all endurance, by thus being held up to public derision, the victim sprang upon his witty opponent, shouting:

"At least I can crush the toad!"

But again he reckoned without his host.

Calling into requisition an art with which Indians are but little familiar, but in which Old Hard Head had thoroughly instructed him, our hero knocked the impetuous Kioway off his pins.

He rose insane with fury, dashed the blood from his eyes and charged again, this time with a drawn hunting-knife.

Catching the descending wrist in his left hand, Whirlwind clasped the Kioway about the waist with his supple right arm.

A terrific struggle ensued, in which the contestants could scarcely be distinguished; but when they fell so the ground, our hero was uppermost. He was seen to tear the knife from the murderer's hand and bear it aloft until its polished blade flashed in the sun, with nothing between its keen point and the defenseless breast for which it seemed to thirst.

In that moment, grandly yet terribly beautiful—a beautiful avenger!—the conqueror showed how appropriately he had been named. The torrent of his wrath was as the sweep of the whirlwind!

A cry—a rush like the swoop of a swallow—his hand was restrained.

He turned his head. The eyes of Waving Plume looked an agonized appeal into his.

With yells of fury, the Kioways came charging upon him, drawn weapons in every hand.

Yielding the knife to Waving Plume, Whirlwind sprang up, and still pinning his foe to the ground with a foot on his breast, faced the mob with cocked revolvers.

In that moment, hedged in on all sides by a wall of bristling weapons, yet undaunted still, with his head thrown back and his eyes flashing fire, he looked like a young demigod!

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DUMB MARPLOT.

THE next instant the fugitives were confronted by a huge bull-dog.

Ollie breathed more freely.

"Come Tige! good Tige!" she whispered, patting the animal on the head.

Every living thing in the ranch loved this gentle maiden. Even this surly brute had yielded to the charm of her kindness, though not half a dozen others on the place dared to touch him.

But this was the dead hour of the night, and Sir Walter was a stranger. The bloodshot eyes of the formidable beast regarded him jealously. He snuffed suspiciously at his heels. The very absence of any menacing growl made him the more terrible.

The coolness with which Sir Walter passed through this ordeal showed his nerve.

As soon as the brute had made these first investigations, Annesley walked forward with an assured step.

Ollie put herself between him and the dog, speaking as sternly as she could to the brute in a whisper.

So the three proceeded to the stables.

Lying on his back beside the door, they found Iago snoring musically. He had got rid of his fellow-gambler, and put the whole flask of wine inside his own jacket!

Passing the sentinel unchallenged, they entered the stables.

With quick, noiseless movements Sir Walter saddled his mare, while Ollie did the same to her filly.

"But you do not mean to accompany me?" he asked, seeing what she was about.

Suddenly there rose in his mind a contingency of which he had not before thought. Did the girl deem it unsafe to remain in her home after assisting him to escape? Was she going with him?

He did not look upon it in the light of "having a woman on his hands," as a burden. His first sensation was a thrill of exquisite delight.

But second, unselfish thought showed him her position.

Thus far he had not thought of love and marriage with her. He had conceived a romantic affection for his long-lost cousin, and a purpose to marry her, if she proved what he hoped. He was a proud noble. This was an unknown child of the wilderness.

But could he put her in the position of elopement with one who did not afterward marry her?

Her next words showed him that he had borrowed a great deal of trouble for nothing.

"I will see you safely on your way," she said, simply.

Sir Walter felt sheepish and angry with himself.

"What a stupid ass I am!" he reflected.

To his companion he whispered:

"But this is incurring a needless risk. Even if we escape, you may not succeed in getting back undetected."

"The greatest danger is that our talk may be overheard," she said, with a touch of impatience.

If Annesley had only known that this was the cousin he was seeking, and that her heart was almost bursting with love for him and despair at the thought of losing him!

"Oh, he will remember me only as a murderer's daughter!" her heart kept crying.

But Annesley heard only that her tone was slightly sharp.

"Have you blankets with which to muffle the horses' feet?" he asked, rather coldly, because he felt hurt, he hardly knew why.

She handed him what he wanted in silence. In silence he proceeded with his work. The first cloud had come between them, all because of love at cross purposes.

Then came the delicate task of leading the horses out of the stalls. It was accomplished without any noise unusual in a stable where many horses are kept.

Without a sound, yet with a deadly vigilance peculiar to his species, Tige followed every movement.

Once more out into the starlight.

Then came the removal of the heavy bars to the outer gate. Despite every precaution, they clanked with alarming loudness in the midnight silence. Then the dry hinges shrieked their protest.

A clammy perspiration oozed from every pore in Ollie's body.

"Oh, God! we shall surely be discovered!" cried her heart.

Sir Walter knew that even if the household was alarmed his own escape was now assured. A bullet in Tige's brain would render all his faithfulness of no avail. Then, mounting, he could dash away, fearing the pursuit of no horse in his host's equerry. But he had no relish for leaving his brave little rescuer to bear the brunt of the storm that would surely follow.

At last the gate stood open, with no sound to indicate that any of the sleeping ranch folk had taken the alarm.

But when Annesley would have led the horses through he found Tige blocking the way with his huge body. His canine instinct seemed to divine that there was something underhanded in all these furtive movements. By a low, ominous growl he announced his determination to make a stand at this point in the suspicious proceedings.

Ollie tried to coax him away.

He only drooped his head nearer to the ground, manifesting no hostility toward her, but keeping his bloodshot eyes fastened upon Walter.

"Oh, what can we do?" cried the girl, in despair. "Every moment's delay in this exposed spot hazards discovery!"

"We cannot be balked now, by a mere brute," said Annesley, frowning impatiently.

And his hand sought the revolver.

"Oh! don't do that!" whispered Ollie, excitedly. "It will rouse the whole household. And I don't want any blood shed. There has been too much of that already!" her thoughts reverting to poor Pedro.

"Let's see if his honor will let me pass out alone," suggested Walter, the grim humor of the thing striking him. "Then perhaps you can follow with the horses."

"Oh, do!" responded Ollie, picking up hope. "And when he thinks that you have gone, maybe I can lead him back into the stable."

Smiling in spite of his anxiety, Sir Walter went through the form of a leave-taking, duly lifting his hat, as he shook hands with Ollie, thrilling her and himself to the heart by the momentary pressure; all of which Tige watched with a jealous eye. Then, when Annesley turned in a matter-of-course way to leave the spot, the dog let him go unmolested.

Then Ollie took the dog by his leather collar, and said:

"Come, Tige!"

Ah! how her heart bounded with relief when, after one questioning look at the horses, the brute yielded.

Annesley saw her enter the stable, and after giving her a reasonable time to secure the marplot, returned and led the horses through the

gate. While waiting for her, he held a cocked revolver in his hand. If the beast broke away from her and came bounding once more to his post, there would be but one thing for it; he must be shot, or he would kill the man who had disregarded his warning.

But no signs of Ollie's return relieved her companion's anxiety. What had happened? Had some one aroused? Annesley waited until he could endure no more, and then he went back to the stable to look the girl up.

"I would rather be recaptured, than go away in doubt as to what is detaining her," he said to himself, not knowing the significance of the strange sense of oppression about his heart.

As he crept near to the open stable door, keeping well in the shadows, he heard voices. All was then discovered!

But let us precede him, entering the stable with Ollie.

As she led the dog in through the black doorway, the girl's heart sunk with a chill presentiment of evil.

She got Tige into an empty stall, fastened the hitching strap through his collar and made him lie down. Then she turned to leave the stable, to be confronted by a dark figure.

Only the thought that it must be Iago come to himself, enabled her to repress a scream. She hoped to be able to persuade him to connive at her escape. But the voice, when the man spoke, showed her that she had a far less tractable person to deal with.

"Mees Ollie, vat is all zis?" asked Anselmo, whom Iago's selfishness had left in full possession of his senses.

The girl's heart was ready to burst with despair. She rushed headlong into a very transparent deception.

"Oh, Anselmo!" she cried, "can you manage Tige? I am going for a ride, and he insists on accompanying me."

"For a ride at zis time of ze night?" asked Anselmo incredulously. "And Senor Annesley—he has ze stranch fancy for riding too, it seems."

"Yes, he will take care of me," said the girl, passing over the man's sarcasm. "He has not tried his mare yet, you know, and thought that a dash over the prairie would be invigorating."

"Ah! no doubt!" chuckled Anselmo. "But he is a strancher. He may not find his way back in ze dark."

"But I know the country. I shall not get lost," protested Ollie, knowing that her struggles to delude the man were hopeless.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed. "I am not sure of zat! If you want to find ze way back—eh?"

"What do you mean?" cried the girl, firing at his insinuation.

"Caramba! vy all so still? Aha! aha! Ve vill see vat Don Enrique thinks of it—no?"

"My father?" cried the girl, in dismay.

"Vy not?"

Then she broke down.

"Oh, Anselmo!" she cried, going up to the man in the darkness, and taking hold of his arm with both hands, "you must not interfere with us!"

"And von Don Enrique ask me for his daughter, I tell him zat I have let her elope before my eyes! Por Dios!"

"Insolent! this is no elopement!" cried the girl, springing back and flaming scarlet there in the darkness.

"Zen it vill break no bones to wait until daylight," said the man, coolly.

"Oh, are you utterly immovable?" cried the girl, in a wild burst of despair. "Let us go, and I will give you all the money I have in the world—all that I get for a year!"

"Money vill not mend a bullet-hole like Pedro's," said the man, significantly.

"Then let Mr. Annesley go alone, without creating a disturbance," cried Ollie, clutching at this chance.

"And carry off ze best mare in ze stable? Oh, no!"

"But it is his own! You know that he bought it."

"Perhaps!"

But at this moment the man felt something like ice touch his temple, and heard an ominous—

"Click-click!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PURCHASE-PRICE OF A SQUAW.

BUT Red Wolf was not yet ready to see his guest butchered before the door of his wigwam.

This was no ordinary youth who had come so boldly into his village, and shown himself a master in everything that constitutes Indian accomplishments.

With a bound the chief was at his side, with uplifted hand and stern voice, ordering his braves back.

They retreated, yet with sullen regards.

Whirlwind instantly replaced his revolvers, took his foot from the breast of the prostrate Rattlesnake, and stood at ease, as self-possessed as if nothing unusual had happened.

But for all his unmoved exterior, a fierce conflict was going on within his breast.

"Was it Waving Plume's purpose to save the life of that treacherous dog, or to prevent me from drawing down certain death upon myself by slaying the coward?" he kept asking himself. "Him or me she assuredly loves, or her soul would never have so leaped from her eyes. But which?"

He was too proud to look at her. Alone with her he could play the lover with any Romeo of them all; but in public he drew down that iron visor with which it is the pride of the savage to mask his feelings.

Even had he looked, he would have got no sign from her. She felt that in the light of Wa-na-kee-to's prophecy and her own manifest detestation of Rattlesnake, no one of her people would mistake the significance of her present frantic solicitude. So, abashed, she crept away, and hid herself once more in her lodge, unconsciously carrying the knife with her.

The Rattlesnake was completely conquered and cowed. Whirlwind had beaten him in every trial, and with perfect ease. In the last struggle, the terrific energy put forth, and the lightning quickness of movement—for the Delaware youth had been thoroughly aroused—made his antagonist feel like a child in his hands. The Kioway knew that only Waving Plume's intervention had saved his life.

Henceforth he would never dare to attack his conqueror openly; but if he got a chance to shoot him from ambush—

He rose and slunk away with the crowd, muttering, for all who might be within hearing of his low growl:

"Medicine! Medicine!"

Afterward, he sought to redeem his credit, by enlarging upon this insinuation, explaining to his friends—indeed, to all who would listen to him—that throughout the contest he had felt his powers paralyzed by a mysterious influence that weighed upon him like a nightmare.

"Did not Wa-wa-kee-to foretell his coming?" he demanded. "Then who could contend with one through whose hand the Manitou strikes?"

And most, if not all, accepted this explanation of their champion's defeat; and in after years, when the name of Whirlwind became a terror all along the border, and a power among the savages, the story was repeated, and spread the belief that the great chief was supernaturally endowed.

Even now Red Wolf could not repress a look of admiration at the perfect self-possession of the stripling, as he said:

"Whirlwind has proved himself worthy of his name. He is skilled in all things far beyond his years. His courage is the courage that makes chiefs. But he has not yet told his mission. Why has he come among my people?"

"Red Wolf speaks out of a great heart," replied our hero, with a lofty dignity which fairly rivaled that of the chief himself. "He has no ignoble envy that would take from another his due. Whirlwind had a purpose in letting you see that he was no mean brave, out of the common crowd. He would speak to you as a brother—as a fellow-chief. Do you say that no one can be a chief without followers? I reply: If all Red Wolf's braves were to be slain before the sun goes down, would he be less a chief than now? Not so! What, then, makes the chief? The great soul, the strong arm, the tongue of wisdom! The Manitou breathes upon one among many—he is a chief! Followers gather about him. They are his weapons. They add nothing to the man himself. So, when they die, they take nothing away."

"Whirlwind steps in the tracks of no leader. He goes upon the war-path alone. He is chief of himself! He scorns even to seek followers. Do not doubt that they will find him, and ask him to lead them."

Of course this was all braggadocio; but an Indian is nothing if not bombastic. It impressed the crowd, and Red Wolf was not displeased.

"Good!" he said. "Whirlwind is as clever with his tongue as in all else. Let him speak. Red Wolf's ears are open."

"Whirlwind brings presents to the great sagamore of the Kioways—these horses. They are not many; but you see that they are fleet and strong. Any one of them is worthy to bear a chief."

"Ugh! Good!" was Red Wolf's assent.

"And what does Whirlwind ask in return?"

"The Flower of the Kioways—Waving Plume!"

"Ugh!"

And the old diplomat affected to frown, as if he had not expected this demand all along.

Whirlwind stood proud and confident, as if it were a matter of course that what he asked for should be granted. But let him not halloo before he is out of the woods!

Red Wolf affected to examine the horses carefully. Then, like any bargaining jockey, he said:

"Whirlwind's presents are good. But, see!—another has been before him. The Rattlesnake has offered two pack-mules, with many blankets, knives, powder, beads and medals."

Whirlwind looked at the bid of his rival. Instead of depreciating its value and urging the

merits of his own, he stood for a moment silent, then blew a shrill whistle.

There was a scampering and cries of alarm; and the milk-white mare came bounding to the side of her master, fairly vaulting over the heads of some who stood in the way.

On her back clung a frightened little savage, like a monkey on a circus horse.

Whirlwind swung the midget to the ground, and almost with the same motion vaulted into his place. Then, while all stood agape, he sped out of the village at a greater speed even than he had entered it.

Waving Plume, who had slyly watched the negotiation through a crevice in her lodge, stood amazed. Had her champion deserted her? At the thought she bridled with fierce indignation. Judging his pride by her own, she inferred that he had thrown up the whole thing in a fit of pique.

"Never will I look upon the weak-hearted traitor again!" she cried, hotly. "A Delaware, and no chief! I have been mad—foolish!"

Whirlwind was piqued, but in a very different way.

"Compete with that dog!" he cried, with flashing eyes. "No! Whirlwind will bring a prize such that the Kioway's trumpery rubbish will be forgotten!"

He resolved not to call upon his patron until his triumph was complete; and so bent his course at once toward the open plain.

But there was no need. Old Hard Head had assurance of his *protege's* safety; and the disappearance of the bearskin directed him where to seek for information.

After waiting a day, he called upon Red Wolf, and without betraying his relations with Whirlwind easily learned all that had happened.

"Them signs is as plain as b'ar-tracks in the mud," he chuckled, reading Whirlwind's motives aright. "The boy's bound to be at the top o' the heap, or nowhar. An' he'll fotch 'it, too!"

But what was Whirlwind's new scheme? Let the sequel show.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE NIGHT.

"COME, fellow! we've had enough of this," said a low, stern voice in the ear of the astonished vaquero. "Throw up your hands!"

And Anselmo, who knew when he had a man to deal with, complied without a murmur.

The next moment he felt his weapons drawn from his belt; and a moment later his hands were securely bound.

"You will walk ahead of us; and remember, if we are discovered through any unnecessary noise on your part, I will put you beyond the chance of a second act of treachery."

Meanwhile, Ollie had not been unoccupied. Tige had sprung to his feet and was straining upon the halter-strap with the low, wrathful growl which means "business," coming from a bull-dog. It was all that Ollie could do to pacify him, and prevent an outbreak that would bring the whole march about their ears.

"Quiet that dog," commanded Annesley.

And though in his heart the Mexican would have loved to loose the beast and see him tear the Englishman to shreds, he spoke in soft, soothing tones that satisfied the brute that all was right.

Then they once more left the stables.

Now without further hindrance they got into their saddles, and rode cautiously away. Anselmo walking ahead of them, not without misgivings as to what the Englishman purposed to do with him as soon as they got beyond ear-shot from the ranch.

"He will hardly kill me before the eyes of his inamorata," he speculated. "If he finds me and leaves me on the open prairie, I may have the pleasure of being eaten up by wolves before morning. Yet as soon as they get beyond the range of discovery, they will want to ride as fast as possible, to get a fair start, and so will not want to be burdened by me on foot. What an unlucky dog I am, to waken at such a time; or, being awake, why did I not leave the responsibility of the thing where it belonged, with Iago? Caramba! what is it to me if Don Enrique had fifty daughters to elope?"

About a mile from the ranch his fears were put to rest.

"My man," said Sir Walter, in his way, which was short and decisive without the least trace of arrogance, "if you are the sbrewd fellow I take you to be, you will get out of this scrape without further inconvenience; if you are a fool, you will lay up trouble for yourself in the future. Now, I purpose to bind you and leave you here—"

"To be eaten up by the wolves? Excellenza, take my poor life at once! It is not death I fear, but even a brave man may dread torture that—"

"A brave man does not cringe and beg like a hound, even to escape torture," interrupted Annesley, annoyed by the servile air of the Mexican, in such contrast with his manner when dealing with Ollie. "But we are wasting time. Miss Oliphant will presently return and release you. Then, if, as I said, you are wise, you will go quietly back with her, get into

your bed, and forget all that you have seen. Remember, Iago will be held to answer, not you. But if you are too fond of gossip, you will blab; and when I return—not alone, you understand—I will tie you up and give you fifty or a hundred lashes, to let some of the bad blood out of you."

"Eccellenza, you are more merciful than I had reason to hope," replied the Mexican. "Know you, I am blind and deaf; to-morrow I shall be dumb!"

"Very good. I do nothing by halves. As I promised to requite any inconvenience you might bring upon your young lady, so your discretion, if you prove faithful to us, shall not go unrewarded."

Although appearing to take him at his word, Annesley really had but little confidence in a "Greaser." He acted on the motto, "safe bind, safe find," and added a gage by way of "good measure."

Then he rode on with Ollie.

There was an unwonted hush upon the girl. Now that they had come to the point of parting her heart seemed to swell in her very throat. She had not a word to say to him of her own accord. She would have died rather than let him suspect her real feelings; she tried not to acknowledge them even to herself. Yet they crowded upon her so tumultuously that she could think of nothing else, and so remained mute.

"Miss Oliphant," said Annesley, uneasy and puzzled at his own feelings, "do not suppose that I will abandon you in this style. If I were to stay, I should be powerless to help you now. I am almost sorry that I let you take this risk upon yourself—"

"Oh, no! no!" she interrupted, hastily. "Nothing serious will be done to me, even at the worst. And—and—it was your—life—"

A sudden rush of feeling prompted him to tell her that even his life was not worth a moment's pain to her; but he restrained himself.

"I shall return with sufficient support to make it safe, even if your fears are well grounded," he said, waxing in feeling as he proceeded, "and if I find that any one has caused you any trouble he shall repent—"

"No! no! no good can come of it!" she faltered, trying to fight down the wild elation that thrilled her breast at the thought of seeing him again. "Leave me to myself. I assure you that I am unworthy—"

With a sudden swelling of the heart in fierce protest, he reined his horse close to hers and leaned toward her.

Although she could not see the hot flush on his face nor the eager light in his eyes, she heard his deep, tremulous breathing. A moment, and a flood that might have changed the whole tenor of our story would have burst upon her, deluging her heart with a tide of burning words that would have filled her with mingled ecstasy and agony.

With the instinctive shrinking of modesty from that which would have been lotus to her hungry ears, she drew away, and the thought that she was a murderer's daughter added a slight shiver to her shrinking.

To Sir Walter Annesley's sensitive pride that slight act was like a douche of ice-water.

"By Jove!" he thought to himself, with a savage grinding of the teeth, as he recovered, not however without a sense of dizziness, "was I on the point of making a greater ass of myself than ever before in my life? An Annesley, who might have the pick of England's nobility at his nod; and to this—"

But the slightest word in disparagement of her, even in thought, choked him.

"Hang me if she isn't a truer woman than the best of them, anyway!" he was forced to admit.

But he was chilled. The mad moment was past.

"I am afraid that I am taking you too far away from home," he said, a little coldly. "Every moment of delay increases the chances of discovery. I shall never forget your heroic interposition in my behalf, believe me. I can never repay—"

"Do not speak of repayment," she said; and through her low tones ran a thread of hauteur that thrilled him strangely.

It seemed as if a high-bred lady of his own circle were speaking.

"I wish our parting were amid pleasanter surroundings," he said holding out his hand. "But, even it cannot dim the bright spot left in my memory by the few days I have passed in your society. I look forward to a happier meeting in the future."

"Thank you!" was all she said, in return.

An instant her small, cold hand rested passively in his clasp.

"It seems a shame to leave you to find your way back alone in the darkness," he said, wistfully, still lingering.

"Pray do not trifle with your own safety," she said, in a constrained voice.

A last troubled look at her—a murmured "God bless you!"—and she was alone on the night-shrouded prairie, while he dashed away with a feeling of bitter recklessness.

She remained perfectly motionless, gazing

into the black distance which had swallowed up his shadowy form, until the dull thud of his horse's hoofs died away into utter, palpable stillness. Then she turned her horse homeward at a slow walk, with her head hanging upon her breast, and great silent tears falling one by one!

She knew not how far she had gone, when she was suddenly startled from this painful reverie by a deep, guttural Indian salute:—

"How!"

Looking up in alarm she made out in the darkness, directly in her path, the shadowy outlines of an Indian.

Leaning forward and straining her eyes through the gloom, Ollie recognized, with a sense of relief, the Delaware youth whom she had met on that eventful day which marked a new epoch in her life—the day on which she had first seen Sir Walter Annesley.

"Oh! it is Whirlwind," she said.

"The Prairie Flower speaks truly."

"Do you wish anything of me?"

"The Prairie Flower does not fear Whirlwind?"

"Why should I? You would not harm me. Would you?"

"The Prairie Flower knows that her horse is not nearly so fleet as the Swallow. She cannot escape by flight, even so little a distance to yonder ranch."

"No. But why should I need to escape, when you do not wish to detain me?"

"But if I did wish it, it would be foolish to run."

"Yes," she admitted, beginning to feel uneasy at his strange mood.

"If she should scream, the white man who has just left her is too far to hear her voice. Besides, see!" and he drew his keen knife, "I could silence her cries forever, before those at the ranch could rub open their eyes to look for horses to come to her rescue."

He came close up to her and laid his hand on her bridle-rein.

The girl, now completely terrified, could not utter a sound. She had a creeping horror of a knife, and this one held her eyes by fascination.

"Whirlwind was foolish when he let the Prairie Flower go, the other day. To-night she must go with him!"

But scarcely were the words which declared her a prisoner out of his mouth, when from all directions came the swish and thud of horses galloping through the prairie grass, and a spectacle was presented which bade fair to turn the tables on the captor. With yells of vindictive hatred, they charged upon him, a closing cordon of enemies.

Now let the white mare show her mettle; for only she can save her daring master!

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DICKER FOR A BEAUTY.

MEANWHILE, wholly unsuspecting of Ollie's mishap, Sir Walter Annesley urged his flight as if aware of actual pursuit, so that he reached the mountain passes unintercepted.

"That danger is laid, at least for the present," he mused. "Now for this queer old genius whose wit has won the reverence of the savages. His influence will be worth more to me than a battalion of soldiers. Ah! am I within a few days—nay, hours!—of seeing my long-lost cousin? If she but proves like—like—Pshaw! am I a fool?"

He broke off with a feeling of annoyance.

But Love laughs when his victims struggle in that way. Look which way he would, his lordship saw a face with dark, wistful eyes, framed in blonde hair.

The very food he ate was a reminder of her thoughtful care, since she had secretly stored his saddle-bags with jerked buffalo-meat and biscuits made of flour and water, not unlike army hard-tack.

He had to rely upon his firearms to eke out his frugal fare; and this was the indirect cause of getting him into trouble.

With the wind sweeping down the pass directly in his face, he was trudging along where the way was so thickly carpeted with pine spines that his horse's hoofs gave forth no sound, when suddenly his attention was attracted by a scrambling noise at one side of the trail.

The next instant the crested head of a buck appeared above the bushes.

Bang! and away, with the sprinkling blood showing that the quarry was hard hit!

Many a time had Annesley cleared hedge and ditch in merry England, close upon the heels of a baying pack. He loved the chase; and this king of the forest was no sorry little hare.

For once in his life he lost his head, and went scurrying through the Rocky Mountains as if he had nothing more to fear than the growling of some tenant whose field he trampled.

Away he went, and in a moment his neck at nearly every bound; but his eyes glowed, his cheeks were flushed; in that moment of keen enjoyment he thought only of what was ahead, leading the way in such gallant style.

But as the game was nobler, so were the denizens of the soil.

Exasperated by the unfavorable progress of

his suit, and feeling that he must retrieve his honor from the stain it had received by reason of Whirlwind's repeated victories, Rattlesnake had again set out, with a little posse of admirers who still clung to him. They were virtually a band of free-rovers, with their hands against all men. Woe to the unlucky white who fell into their clutches! They regarded no treaties. It is such parties of "young men" who often precipitate the bloody wars of the border.

From a distant peak they discovered Annesley, and, knowing the passes perfectly, they had no difficulty in ambushing a defile through which he must pass.

He had nearly run his game down, when he heard a report, and saw the wounded stag fall.

Instantly he pulled his horse upon its haunches.

Too late!

Around him, like the clansmen of Roderic Dhu, rose from the bushes a score of armed savages.

Directly in front, with his hands held above his head, palms to the front, in token of amity, stood the Rattlesnake.

"How!" was his abrupt salutation.

Sir Walter Annesley was a man of true courage, hence never rash. He saw at a glance that he was utterly at the mercy of these savages. He entertained none of the nonsensical braggadocio about selling his life dearly. The thing was, to save it.

Nothing could do this but coolness. He returned the Rattlesnake's salute, adding:

"What does my brother mean by bringing war in one hand and peace in the other? Have not the Kioways buried the hatchet with the Great Father at Washington?"

"Good!" replied the savage, "the hands of the Rattlesnake are empty and clean. Let my brother put his little rifles out of sight."

"But the braves of the Rattlesnake, who are many to one, stand around as if they had sprung an ambush. Surely they have not their arms in readiness for fear of a single pale-face."

A wave of the hand caused them to put up their brandished weapons.

"Now is the white man satisfied?" asked Rattlesnake.

"Perfectly," replied Annesley, putting his revolvers back, yet loosely, so that they would be ready to his hand.

"Good! we are at peace," said Rattlesnake. "Let me embrace my brother."

As he advanced, his followers also gathered round.

This was too transparent.

"Hold!" cried Annesley, again drawing his revolver. "Let your young men keep back. If there is not treachery in their hearts, why do they crowd about one who is in their midst? There is room enough for all."

A sign deterred them.

"My brother sees that the heart of Rattlesnake is good."

With his left hand resting with apparent carelessness on the hilt of his bowie, which was directly in front of his body, so as to be equally accessible to either hand, Annesley extended his right to his treacherous foe.

Even in that hand-clasp he conveyed a warning to the savage. He had the grip of a vise, and almost brought tears into the eyes of Rattlesnake by the crushing squeeze he gave his digits. It said, as plainly as words:

"None of your tricks; or you will find me an ugly customer to handle."

"Rattlesnake," said that worthy, "is of the village of the Red Wolf. My brother must eat and sleep in the wigwam of the Great Sagamore of the Kioways."

"Ah, the Red Wolf!" cried Annesley. "That is my destination. I have come many miles across the plains to see the great chief in his own home."

Rattlesnake affected surprise and pleasure; but in his heart he believed this a diplomatic lie.

Pursuing no further this skirmish of wits, suffice it to say that Annesley went with his savage escort, ostensibly as a guest, but really as a prisoner.

He did not like the aspect of affairs thus at the outset. He had counted on the invaluable support of Old Hard Head, which he was now forced to forego.

After weighing the matter, he concluded that nothing would be gained by making reference to him at present, since Rattlesnake was plainly hostile, and could easily lie to him, and prevent him from meeting the old trapper. He would reserve this card for Red Wolf.

So they entered the Kioway village.

Here Annesley felt safer than with the party of irresponsible "young men." He might be murdered all the same, but he was not so exposed to a surprise assault, and he had a chance to work on the cupidity of the old chief.

As behooved one whose life or death might turn on the slightest chance, Sir Walter had his eyes about him; and his first discovery on entering the Indian village was his own pack-mules!

"Perhaps it is lucky for me that they fell into no worse hands," he reflected. "They will

serve to corroborate my story, and give support to my promises."

He did not appear to recognize them, but saluted Red Wolf with every appearance of cordiality and confidence.

Of course, the first ceremonial was a pipe, pending the provision of food.

And right here, at the outset, Annesley was thrilled by the sight of something for which he had looked ever since setting foot within the borders of the village—no less an object than Waving Plume herself.

The girl was at her best. At the outset of the commotion, she had overheard a little Indian girl running to hide, crying out that the terrible Delaware youth had come back. Coquetry prompted her to don her most bewitching costume; so that she was really got up for Annesley's inspection.

Her cheeks were flushed; her eyes were brilliant with excitement; and when, at sight of him, she stopped in surprise, her lips fell slightly apart.

Annesley had seen such faces framed in a mantilla, peeping at him from swinging balconies in Castile.

"That is she—my Spanish cousin!" he declared at once, his eyes reading her from head to foot. "Am I satisfied with her? Is she what I expected—what I hoped?" came the hurried question.

And involuntarily he sighed, and between his eye and Waving Plume rose a phantom with eyes as dark as hers, but hair pure blonde.

"The deuce!" he thought, "must I be haunted by that little witch? Is she to make me dissatisfied with my own cousin—my own flesh and blood? I am not dissatisfied with her! She is regally beautiful. She looks as if she had imbibed much of the savage nature of these devils; but that can be cultivated out of her. By Jove! she'll carry London by storm, after two or three years' training on the Continent. Not as the other one would, though. She looks like a trage—"

He broke off with an oath of annoyance at himself. What had been on his lips was, that she looked like a tragedy queen in an opera; and, indeed, he had vaguely in his mind the *Cipsy* queen in the *Bohemian Girl*.

The comparison was not inapt.

"This is the far-famed Waving Plume, is it?" he asked, wishing to hear her voice.

"I am the daughter of Red Wolf!" replied the *Klaway* princess, haughtily.

"His child by adoption," suggested Annesley, with a feeling of annoyance on his side that his cousin should so coolly claim relationship with the greasy old butcher beside him. "Everybody knows that the blood of Red Wolf does not actually run in the veins of his beautiful princess."

He turned to the chief for confirmation of his statement.

Red Wolf only grunted, non-committally.

Waving Plume answered for herself:

"My heart is all red! That is enough!"

"Listen to what I have to say," said Annesley, resolved to state his business at once, now that the way was open. "My home is far beyond the great salt lake, where I am a great chief, with many wigwams of stone bigger than the adobe forts on the plains. My young men are many; but they do not live by the chase, as do the Indians, but by tilling the ground, like the white men in the States. Yet I have more horses than I can ride, and more medals than I could bear upon my shoulders, if they were put in the haversacks of the soldiers."

"You have been in the forts?" he asked Waving Plume, breaking off his narrative abruptly.

"Yes," she replied.

"And you know that every seventh day they call Sunday?"

With a slight curl of the lip, she said:

"Waving Plume is but a simple Indian girl; but she knows much of the white man's wisdom."

"Well, you know that on Sunday the officers' wives wore more beautiful dresses than on the other six days?"

"Yes," she returned, plainly wondering what all this was to lead up to.

"My mother and my sisters, and all the women of my family, wear every day, dresses much more beautiful than the best that the wives of the army officers wear on Sunday. Besides this, you have seen the beads, like drops of dew, that the ladies of the fort wear in their ears?"

Waving Plume's eyes sparkled.

"They are very beautiful," she said, with a sidelong glance at her own simple beads.

"If you were my sister—or my cousin," said Annesley, his voice trembling with eagerness, as he watched the effect of his words, "you would have many—as many as the beads on your necklace, here, and much larger than any you have ever seen, and brighter—so bright that you would think a sunbeam had got imprisoned in each of them."

Waving Plume caught her breath. Her eyes flashed; her cheeks flushed; her bosom swelled. Her coquettish Spanish nature dearly loved beautiful ornaments.

"You have heard the officers' wives sing?—

and play on the guitar? The women in my house have much larger and sweeter instruments—as loud as a dozen guitars, yet soft and sweet too. I could not make you understand the many beautiful things they have—everything that can make them happy, so that if you were one of them you would laugh and sing all day long."

His words brought a troubled look to Waving Plume's face—mingled wistfulness and disdain.

Turning from her, he addressed himself to Red Wolf, though of course intending that she should hear what he said.

"Many moons ago a kinswoman of mine married a Spanish don, and came to Mexico to live, in Chihuahua. They had one daughter, who, if living now, must be nineteen years old. While she was yet an infant, her father's ranch was burned by the Indians, and the child carried into captivity. It was to find this girl, my cousin, that I came across the great salt lake. I had two mules heavily loaded with many things that make the red-man's heart glad, that I intended to give as a ransom for her. But ten days ago they were captured by a party of Sioux."

During this narrative old Red Wolf had begun to "smell a mouse." He slyly glanced around to see if the mules were out of sight.

"Bad Sioux!" he now said, sententiously.

"But," pursued Annesley, "if I find my cousin, and am pleased with her, I shall go to the nearest fort and buy four mules, each loaded much more heavily than those lost, with blankets, and guns, and powder, and knives, and medals, and fire-water. Would that be a good ransom for a young squaw?"

"Maybe so," said Red Wolf, diplomatically.

"I have found her," declared Annesley, without further preliminaries. "This is she—Waving Plume!"

Old Red Wolf betrayed no surprise; but the Rattlesnake started with a smothered ejaculation of rage, and a hand on the hilt of his scalping-knife. Was this another claimant for the squaw he coveted?

Paying no heed to him, Annesley went on:

"I will give you four mules for her, more heavily laden than the other two."

Then to Waving Plume, herself:—

"You are my cousin. Will you go with me and have all the beautiful things I have described, and be happier than ever before in your life?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN CAPTIVITY.

ANSELMO was not the only one roused from his slumbers by the stealthy movements of the fugitives.

A young half-breed—a mere lad—saw with fear-distended eyes the predicament in which the vaquero had got himself. In wholesome dread of the Englishman's revolver, he first crept back to the shock of dried prairie grass that served him as a bed, and pretended to be asleep. Then a counter, fear of his master's anger, if this shirking of duty were ever discovered, prompted him to shake into wakefulness a deep-sleeping herder.

"Blood of my body!" cried the Mexican, when he heard the story. "And you let the *ladron* escape?"

Without stopping to hear the lad's wordy defense, he hustled into his trousers, secured his weapons, and rushed off to the gate.

But the fugitives were out of sight; and, being a shrewd fellow, instead of making an uproar, and so putting them on their guard, he hastened to arouse his master, with a view to recapture by strategy.

It was a delicate matter for an inferior to try to stem the tide of Hank Oliphant's rage, and point out to him that the roaring-bull method would but defeat its own ends, in this case. The herder might not have succeeded, but that he was promptly seconded by Harry Oliphant, who took the management of the affair at once into his own hands.

Santa Fe Bob, in his rage, very nearly forgot his role of Spanish Don. But after he had blunted the edge of his fury by copious profanity, he became a valuable assistant to Harry.

Quietly the whole force of the ranch was awakened and mounted. Then dividing into two parties, one led by Harry Oliphant, and the other ostensibly by his father, but really under the direction of Santa Fe Bob, they set out to intercept the fugitives.

All believed that it was an elopement; and there was little love for Sir Walter Annesley among those wild fellows, any one of whom would have laid down his life in the service of his fair young mistress.

"Boys," was the last injunction of the ranchero, who, you may believe, did not let slip this opportunity to give a semblance of public justice to the execution of his private plot, "there is but one way to deal with a cowardly 'ound that would steal the daughter of a man 'oo 'ad saved 'is life. I want 'is black 'art!—remember that."

The men growled their fierce assent to this revenge.

Then like shadows they scurried away in the darkness.

We have seen that they sprung their trap on the wrong game; but in the darkness this mistake was undiscovered; and in their impetuous onslaught, Whirlwind might be slain before he was distinguished from the Englishman.

Our hero knew that so long as he kept close to his captive, her friends would not dare to use firearms.

But had the case been different, he would not have swerved from his determination to cling to his prisoner. There was no glory in capturing an unprotected girl, and he did it only to serve another purpose; but if he could snatch her from the very midst of her people—that were a feat worthy of a great chief!

"Dare not to throw yourself from the saddle!" he commanded her, sternly, "or I will stay to slay you, though I lose my own life in the doing of it. Whirlwind will not be balked by a squaw."

Then clutching her bridle-rein and goading her horse with a sharp splot of the leathern thong, he uttered to his own faithful mare the low cry to which he had trained her to respond with an alert watchfulness of his movements. Guiding her entirely with his knees, he held a revolver in one hand.

So he made his dash, not toward the mountain, in which part of the circle he knew that his foes would center their force, but toward the one unguarded point, the return path to the ranch.

In his rear thundered the yelling vaqueros; on either side the two horns of the crescent were closing in to intercept him.

His revolver spoke.

On his right the leading foe fell headlong to the ground—a riderless horse ran wild!

On swept the chase!

Sitting on the side of her horse next her captor, Ollie dared not try to leap from her saddle, hurling herself in the very midst of the horses' flying heels. Almost dead with fear, she clung on, praying that her friends might circumvent this bold abductor.

But she saw that the very fleetness of her filly was a disadvantage now. The mettlesome little beast, stimulated by the example of Whirlwind's peerless mare, was bearing her through the breach in her friends' ranks.

Again Whirlwind fired—now to his left, at a rider pressing far in advance of his fellows. But the motion of his flying horse, combined with the awkwardness of the position he had to assume, defeated his aim.

The next instant, with a whizzing sound, a lariat settled about the neck of Ollie's steed.

Instantly her headlong course was checked. There was no time to cut the lasso, and free her. The delay would have been fatal.

Whirlwind was equal to the emergency. Throwing his athletic arm about the girl's slender waist, he lifted her from her saddle to his horse's withers.

Then he uttered a cry that called forth all the little beauty's powers. Like a meteor she darted forward, showing how she had held her wonderful speed in reserve, even while outstripping all competitors.

Long before they reached the ranch he had left his pursuers hopelessly in the rear, and so bent his course northward.

It was now a chase of endurance. If the gallant little mare could bear her double burden for hours and even days at greater speed than her pursuers, single-mounted, she might succeed; otherwise, when she came to near the mountains, she might find herself intercepted.

"This is our only hope," said Harry Oliphant, when, an hour later, he halted his men, the little mare having long since got beyond their range of vision. "We must return to the ranch, provision ourselves for a long chase, and then sending one party to take possession of all the passes, follow the trail with another, until we run him into the ground. I never dreamed that that mare had such speed wrapped up in her skin, and more than that that Johnny Bull was such a sharp one! Egad! he has 'left' us badly!"

Hank Oliphant chafed at his defeat, and swore at his men severally and collectively, as if in some way they were responsible for it.

But there was nothing for it but to act on Harry's suggestion.

However, there was one man who would not listen to taking the back track.

"Senor," said Santa Fe Bob, in his role of Don Gonzales, "ze hospitality of my host has been outrage while I was beneath his roof. I feel zat my honor is at stake; and a Spaniard never fails to respond to ze call of honor. I shall not rest or sleep until my steel is in ze heart of ze ravisier! *A dios, senor!* I will bring your daughter, or ze heart of her abductor!"

Harry Oliphant looked hard at this grandiloquent speaker.

"You accursed humbug!" he reflected, his serene face betraying nothing of what was passing within, "the day will come when I shall have to help you to pass in your checks. What are you plotting now? Have you fallen in love with the girl, yourself? and are you willing to

sacrifice everything else to gain possession of her?"

Harry Oliphant had guessed at the literal truth! Sweet Ollie had in Santa Fe Bob a more terrible enemy than in all her other foes combined. They would have sacrificed her for money; he would make her a slave to his evil passions.

Leaving the others there on the open plain, he dismounted, threw his bridle-rein over his arm, and lighting his way by a dark lantern which he always carried, set out on the trail.

The vaqueros were hurriedly divided into two parties. One was to set out immediately for the foothills, and ambush all the passes. The other was to return to the ranch for provisions. In the morning a part of them would follow the advance squad, while another portion, under the leadership of Harry Oliphant, would take the trail, and by the use of extra horses force their advance in the hope of overtaking both Santa Fe Bob and the abductor, whom they still believed to be Sir Walter Annesley.

This was all very shrewdly devised, but Whirlwind knew their best move as well as they did themselves, and also how to frustrate it.

No sooner had he "dropped" his pursuers, than he leaped from his mare's back and, twisting his fingers in her mane, ran beside her at a speed that would seem incredible to one who had not seen the feat performed.

There was no danger of his overtaking his little beauty, when he could take the labor upon himself.

Drawn along at great sprawling strides, his task being merely to bound into the air, he thus advanced, directly toward the mountains, until daybreak.

At a stream which was so low that it was only a succession of pools connected by a mere thread of running water, he stopped to give his horse half an hour to graze, while he himself, taking no rest, went back to the crest of the last roll in the prairie, to lie on his belly and watch.

He contented himself with merely warning Ollie not to attempt to escape, on pain of death by the knife and scalping. Already he had discovered her shrinking horror of this weapon.

Luckily for Santa Fe Bob, he did not come up in time to run into Whirlwind's ambush.

When they reached the mountains, hours in advance of any of the parties sent to intercept them, Whirlwind took every precaution to break their trail.

He was not needlessly harsh to Ollie; but when he slept, he bound her securely.

The effect on the girl was the utter prostration of despair. She sat her horse with drooping head, hard, tearless eyes, and bloodless lips. She tried to eat the food that was offered her, but after one or two mouthfuls put it aside.

During the times of rest, she sat gazing blankly into space, or leaned listlessly against a boulder or the trunk of a tree, with closed eyes. When she looked at her captor, there was neither reproach nor appeal in her glance.

She was the picture of gaunt, haggard misery. This was most apparent when she slept, with fitful starts, and moans, and mutterings.

Whirlwind was deeply impressed by the change a few hours had wrought.

"She has dropped like a bird in a snare," he said to himself, gazing wistfully at her. "She will die in captivity. This is not like fighting warriors. Bah! am I the only brave that has taken a squaw prisoner? She will forget her home and brighten again, in time."

But his association with even rough Old Hard Head! had weeded out some of the worst traits of his savage nature. Visiting the border towns with the old trapper, he had seen the esteem in which white women were held by their men. So he had imbibed a sort of rude chivalry.

"Why does the Prairie Flower droop?" he asked her. "Is not the sun as bright, the wind as free, in the mountains as on the plain?"

She turned her dull, sad eyes upon his face.

"Suppose Whirlwind were taken from his mountain home and made to work like the Indians on my father's ranch? Would he be light of heart?"

"That could not be!" he declared, with a proud flash in his eyes. "No one could hold Whirlwind in slavery! He would fight his masters until either they or he was dead!"

"I am only a weak woman," was her reply. "I cannot fight you. I can only wait until death releases me from my misery!"

She looked away from him, and lapsed again into the dead silence of utter despair.

He frowned as much with perplexity and a sense of shame, as with anger. Again he said to himself:—

"This is not like fighting warriors. Would Old Hard Head think that there was glory in this? Ah! but it is not glory that I am seeking. She is a gift to Red Wolf, in exchange for Waving Plume. The Rattlesnake can find nothing equal to her. Next to Waving Plume, she is the most beautiful squaw I have ever seen—too beautiful to die like this."

In this mood he neared the vicinity of Red Wolf's camp. But instead of taking her at once to the chief, he bound her securely and left her

hidden in a thicket, while he went off by himself to think the matter over.

Here was an unusual situation—an Indian taking compassion on his captive! All selfish considerations were on one side, and on the other a sentiment of mercy caught from the white man who had brought him up.

Not half an hour after he left her she heard approaching footsteps; the thicket was parted; and she looked up into a face whose expression of intense hatred and murderous purpose froze her to stone. Like one fascinated, she could see only a pair of gleaming black eyes and a flashing knife-blade.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WAVING PLUME'S LOVE.

WAVING PLUME stared at the stranger who offered her a new destiny, so different from that to which she had looked forward. A great lady in a strange land!

She had long felt vaguely that she was different from the people by whom she was surrounded. Nature's mirrors, the still pools, had told her that she was fair to look upon—of a different type, indeed, from the most pleasing Indian girls.

Could it be true that she was not of their blood? Was Red Wolf not her father? Had she been dragged from her proper home, as this stranger said? She had seen captives of this sort.

She no Indian, but a white! Her heart swelled. A tremor of fear took possession of her. She looked to Red Wolf for explanation before she should answer the startling proposal that had burst upon her like lightning from a clear sky.

Sir Walter read the working of her mind, and turning to Red Wolf, said:

"Speak! Are not my words true? This is no child of yours, but a captive, taken in babyhood from Chihuahua, Mexico?"

But the Kioway sagamore smoked placidly on. His eyes contracted shrewdly.

"How many horses?" he asked, as if this were a very relevant question.

Annesley cared nothing for the means, so long as his end was accomplished.

"Four horses packed like the mules," he said.

"But answer me: is not this a white woman?"

"Five horses," said Red Wolf, doggedly.

"No. Four horses; no more, no less," said Annesley, knowing that nothing but firmness will do in bargaining with an Indian.

"Four horses, one mule," suggested Red Wolf, by way of compromise.

"No. Four horses," persisted Annesley.

Red Wolf retired into sulky silence.

Annesley saw that there was nothing to be made out of him in this humor. He turned again to Waving Plume.

"Why need we argue this question?" he asked. "It is plain beyond question that you are not an Indian girl. You have not an Indian feature. Your hair is fine and wavy, not coarse and straight like that of the women you see about you. Your intelligence is far above theirs, and you are as different from them in feeling as in everything else. In the hunters' camps all through the mountains it is notorious that you are not an Indian. Besides, I have all the particulars of your captivity. As I have told you, you are my cousin, daughter of Don Gofredo Carmagnola—"

"Stop!" cried Waving Plume, with a sudden imperious gesture. "Your tongue is crooked! I am the child of Red Wolf, the Kioway sagamore! Why do you wish to steal me from my people? Keep your horses! You cannot buy me. I refuse to go with you."

And she went over to the old chief's side, and put her hand on his arm, as if pleading for protection.

Annesley was staggered. Here was opposition in a quarter where he had least looked for it. He had thought it would be necessary only to tell her the brighter fate in store for her, to have her eager to go with him. He stared at her blankly.

"But you cannot prefer this rude life to what I offer you!" he at last found breath to exclaim. "You do not know what you are giving up. The life in the forts is much preferable to this, yet it is not a circumstance to what will be yours."

At that moment he thought of the old trapper, and brought him forward in support of his cause.

"Do you doubt what I tell you? You know Old Hard Head? His tongue is straight. All Indians believe him. Well, he will tell you that my words are all true. I will bring him to your camp—"

With a wave of her hand she stopped him. She had been as pale as death; but at mention of Old Hard Head she flushed scarlet to the roots of her hair.

What did it all mean? Annesley was completely nonplused.

"Well, the simplest of the sex puzzles us!" he reflected. "Now, what is passing through the mind of this girl? The fact is, she doesn't want to believe me."

But further discussion was cut short by the

appearance of a runner, who announced something to Red Wolf in a whisper.

The chief merely grunted; but Waving Plume, who had overheard the communication, became excited.

She whispered something rapidly.

Red Wolf started.

He said something in the Kioway dialect, which was, of course, "all Greek" to Annesley. Its import was speedily made manifest, however.

The Englishman suddenly found himself clutched from behind, and before he could make an effort to defend himself he was disarmed, thrown to the ground, and bound and gagged.

He was then hustled off to a tepee, where he was half smothered beneath a pile of freshly-cured, hence far from sweet-smelling, buffalo-skins.

"And I owe this to my own cousin!" he reflected, bitterly. "Could humanity be more misguided than this? I hazard my life for her, and shall probably lose it through her perversity!"

A few minutes later he heard a voice that thrilled him.

"That is a white man, and must be Old Hard Head," he reflected. "She is so determined not to go with me that she has prevented our meeting. Oh! for a word with that rough old fellow!"

It was Old Hard Head, and Annesley was right in supposing that his present uncomfortable position was at Waving Plume's instigation.

Instead of waiting to meet the old trapper, the girl hastened from the camp, hurrying through the wilderness like one possessed.

"Not an Indian, but a white woman!" she cried, to herself. "His words are true—I feel it! But what then? Go with him? Be a great woman in his country? Leave all that is dear to me here!—my freedom, my friends, all!"

She pressed her hands over her heart. It seemed bursting, as she thought of Whirlwind.

"No! no!—I cannot! I will not!" she cried aloud, thrusting her fingers into her ears, as if to shut out the pleading of a tempter.

"All would be darkness and despair!" she pursued. "What is life without my love? Nothing could replace that! I love him! Ay, Delaware or not, I love him!"

But the acknowledgment was scarcely out of her mouth, when she caught her breath with a gasp, as if struck with a mortal chill.

All the color died out of her cheek; her eyes fairly blazed.

"Ah, traitor! He has consoled himself so soon!" she cried.

She was gazing down into a pass that ran below her position.

What she saw was Whirlwind, leading his milk-white mare, with Ollie Oliphant mounted on her back!

"Ah! he shall not long enjoy his white squaw!" she cried, between her clinched teeth. "I will slay her!—I will slay her!"

In her changed mood, Waving Plume looked like a beautiful demon. All her wild nature was aroused. Remember, it was Spanish blood and Indian training! The only code of right she had ever seen practiced was the law of the strongest. Murder was not the same to her that it would be to one who had been reared amid different influences.

With blazing eyes and heaving bosom, she followed those whose relation she had so unluckily misconceived. She saw Ollie left in the thicket, and resolved to wreak her vengeance without delay.

"He shall find her dead!" she declared; and drawing her knife, penetrated to the side of the helpless-bound captive.

"So!" she cried, bending over her, and glaring into her eyes a fierce, tigerish hatred, "you have won him by your accursed beauty! But you shall die! See! as if you were a serpent in my path, I drive this knife to your heart!"

And the keen pointed weapon gleamed above the all unprotected breast.

Ollie could but stare in mute horror at the jealousy-crazed murderess.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

INHERITED barbarism and more or less imperfectly acquired civilization were waging a battle royal in Whirlwind's heart. The rage thus engendered sought to vent itself in a struggle with nature. So he urged his horse up the most rugged ascents, assailing obstacles as if they were enemies.

At last he stood on a pinnacle of rock, like an equestrian statue springing from the apex of a dome. Deep valleys lay beneath him on every hand. Limitless space extended around and above him. The bracing winds of heaven, as if reveling in their freedom, tossed his plumes and swept out his mare's tail and mane.

As he gazed around with kindling eye and snuffed the pure air with dilating nostril, a wild elation began to expand his breast; he felt his blood course through his veins with a new thrill of delight; his muscles seemed to be gathering up a new strength.

In such moments heroes are born. Although he knew not the significance of his sensations,

he was drinking inspiration from nature's chalice!

A trifling circumstance now might turn the scale for good or ill. On the one hand, he would be equal to the magnanimity of returning Ollie to her home unharmed, foregoing his own interests; on the other, he might sacrifice her without a twinge of conscience.

In that moment his eye was arrested by a spectacle that decided his future with the instantaneous quickness of a flash of lightning.

It was a body of horsemen threading a pass far below him.

First came a cry of keen humiliation:

"Ah! I failed to hide my trail!"

He might have spared himself this reproach. His precautions had been effective enough; but, supposing that he was following Sir Walter, the ranchero had abandoned the impracticable trail, and made directly for Old Hard Head's dug-out.

Next came a cry of wild elation and fierce purpose:

"He has all his vaqueros at his heels! The fool has left his home unprotected! This is my opportunity! Away! away!"

All scruples were now dead and buried in forgetfulness. He knew only ambition.

Down the rugged way he urged his mare, at the imminent risk of both their necks.

Here the animal would gather her gambrels under her and fairly slide down some steep incline; there she would leap a chasm which only her springy muscles might attempt; further on she would pick her way among the crags with the nice care of a mountaineer; but the moment she reached a piece of ground where it was possible he urged her into a gallop, so pressing was his impatience.

So he burst upon Waving Plume in the very act of murder.

She heard the clang of his horse's hoofs. It would never do to be detected in this act of treachery. That he might slay her in his rage was the least of her concerns. What she shrank from was, not death, but the thought that he would hate her for robbing him of his love. How bitter that hate would be she guessed by her feelings toward the beautiful girl whom she thought her rival.

With a suppressed cry of rage and despair she fled, leaving her full purpose unaccomplished.

Whirlwind burst into the coppice to find his captive in a swoon. He did not stop to revive her, but lifting her in his arms, bore her to his horse, and hurried to Red Wolf's camp.

Waving Plume, who was on the lookout, was not a little astonished at the proceeding. Through her raging jealousy burst a gleam of Whirlwind's purpose.

"Can it be that he is still faithful?" she asked herself.

Old Hard Head's visit had been a brief one, so that he was not on the spot to witness his protegee's entry. There was all the dash and a great deal more earnestness than on the previous occasion.

Lifting the still-unconscious Ollie from his mare's back, he laid her at the feet of the rather astonished Red Wolf.

"I have brought another present to the great sagamore of the Kioways," he said. "Not that he is a fair exchange for Waving Plume; yet Red Wolf may take many captives before he finds one so beautiful. But this is not all. If the Kioway would have many horses and cattle, let him place his young men whose hearts are hot for war under my lead."

"This is good talk," said Red Wolf, whose eyes were drinking in the loveliness of the captive offered him. "Whirlwind does quickly and well in his youth what many braves could not do even in the fullness of manhood. But is it seemly to give a boy command over braves much older than he is?"

"My heart is fifty years old!" cried young Hotspur.

"Yes, but your head?" still objected the cautious old chief. "What if in the heat of young blood you lead my warriors into some death-trap, where they will melt away like snow?"

"Let Red Wolf go too, to watch over his braves, that they do not run into danger," said Whirlwind, with just a touch of sarcasm.

"Under the leadership of a boy?" asked the chief.

"I will be content to act as guide for the great Kioway," said the young diplomat.

He then told his schemes and its chance of success.

Red Wolf seemed to take the contagion from the fiery young orator, and the most vigorous preparations were urged.

But it would not do to leave the prisoners—especially Ollie—to be found by her father. Whirlwind suggested the place for their concealment.

When all was in readiness, Annesley was led from the tepee in which he had been hidden from Old Hard Head.

Ollie was now revived, and sat the horse on which she had been placed by her captors, the picture of fearless despair.

At sight of her Sir Walter's heart was pierced as with a poisoned arrow. An involuntary cry escaped his lips. She looked up and saw him.

She could not control her emotions. Her eyes, her whitening cheeks, an involuntary gesture, as if to extend her arms, spoke her love.

"You, too, a prisoner?" she cried, in a voice which seemed to add: "Then all is lost indeed!"

There was a moment in which it seemed as if he would exert the strength of a Hercules, and burst his bonds. But he recognized the futility of violence.

"My God! how did this come about?" he groaned.

In that moment he realized that the most terrible of calamities had befallen him. His cousin was forgotten. He thought only of her whom he now knew he loved.

Waving Plume stood by and saw their emotion; and through her heart shot a thrill of wild delight.

"Ah! now I see a way out of all my trouble!" she mused.

Whirlwind recognized the cavalier who had been in attendance upon Ollie on the night of her capture.

Red Wolf was indifferent to their relations so long as he had them both in his power.

The village was left in the care of the old men and striplings, who were to tell the ranchero, if he came, that their young men had gone on a big hunt.

Annesley and Ollie were put in the care of two trusty braves under the direction of Whirlwind, while the rest of the band, following out-of-the-way passes, to avoid the whites, made for the prairie, where they were to be joined by our hero, as soon as he had seen the captives safely secreted.

Now there was one personage who had a very deep interest in the smaller party. With craft that would not have dishonored a brave, Waving Plume tracked the prisoners and saw where they were hidden.

It was a little glen whose approaches were a perfect labyrinth, where one not perfectly familiar with the passes was equally liable to get lost, going in or coming out.

Leaving the spot and returning immediately to the village, this was the problem Waving Plume strove to solve:

"He loves her. If I can help them to escape before my father returns, he will hasten away with her, forgetting me; and I shall be troubled with him no more. Go with him, and leave—"

She finished the sentence only in pictured thought. A vision of Whirlwind caused her heart to glow!

She had four or five days in which to carry her purpose into effect. She took the first step at once. She must have horses in readiness to avail herself of the first chance that favored her scheme.

By sundown she had two strong and fleet horses and her own pony secreted in an adjoining valley.

Then she returned to the village, yet at a loss how to proceed to divert the two guards from their duty.

As she approached the village, she left the ordinary path, to steal in unobserved. She did not wish her coming and going at night to lay grounds for suspicion in the future.

Moving stealthily forward, with every sense on the alert, she suddenly became aware of the presence of some one in the wood. She stopped at once, shrinking close to the trunk of a giant old oak.

She heard low, whispering voices and cautious footsteps, and a moment later detected two white men approaching the spot where she stood.

It was too late to think of retreat. A moment, and she would immediately be discovered!

She crouched down that they might pass her. Then with her outstretched hand she discovered that the tree was hollow, and recognized it as one where the children often came to play wigwam, if we may so express what corresponds to playing house, among us.

With a gliding motion, she entered the aperture, and stood upright, her heart palpitating with the wild uncertainty—would she be detected?

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SURROUND.

RED WOLF had assumed that the ranchero and his men would have no motive for attacking his poor village; and by the time they had learned their bitter provocation, he would be back to defend his own.

But just here came in Santa Fe Bob in the character of a marplot.

He had followed Whirlwind's trail with the pertinacity of a bloodhound, and made one discovery which had escaped Hank Oliphant. Kneeling and carefully examining the tracks on the following morning, he exclaimed:

"This hyar boss has run barefoot all his life! It ain't no States boss, I'll swar. But Hank's mare is—blooded stock from old Kaintuck. An' look a-hyar!—this cuss has lightened his load by runnin'. But the Cap never made them moccasin tracks fur nothin'. Blow me ef I believe it's him we're follerin'!"

Then, by that acuteness of reasoning often developed in men who have to balance the probabilities of the indications of a trail, Santa Fe Bob arrived at the truth, so far as it was material.

"Thunder an' lightnin'! maybe she didn't skeddaddle with the Cap after all! I'll bet my head she dropped to our racket an' put him up to shake us! But hyar comes Mr. Injun. What had he to do with it? Maybe that was the little joker she hadn't figgered fur."

Convinced that he was on the track of a new complication, Santa Fe Bob urged his course; but Whirlwind nevertheless reached the mountains first; and there the trail was hopelessly lost.

"That puts me on general principles," mused Bob. "What did the galoot enter this hyar pass fur, and at what points kin he git out of it?"

Now his previous knowledge of this section of country helped him. Abandoning the fruitless search for the trail, he rode boldly forward, examining various points carefully.

A series of reasonings, with which we will not weary the reader, brought him almost directly over the course taken by Whirlwind. Still all was in doubt, until chance (which is an important element in all detective work, but which, however, most often ekes out careful reasoning) favored him.

He actually saw Whirlwind bearing the unconscious Ollie into Red Wolf's village!

But he was on one side of a deep ravine, while the Indian youth was on the other, so that an attempt to intercept him would have merely betrayed his presence without doing any good.

Crossing the ravine, he got upon the fresh trail and followed it until he could look into the village and see the excitement which he supposed was caused merely by this new captive.

"Waal, my beauty, you'll be safe hyer till I call fur ye," he said. "The next thing is to look up Hank Guppy. Lucky I didn't wait fur him."

Meanwhile the ranchero was searching for Old Hard Head's dug-out. He found the lake, and finally the hut itself, where the bears were keeping house in the absence of their master.

"We might fire holf a fusilade and then send him a general shout, but that would warn 'is lordship, too, if 'e's about," suggested Hank Oliphant.

"And is not already warned," supplemented Harry. "It looks as if he might have been here, and the old fellow, getting wind of us, was helping him off."

At that the ranchero swore roundly.

"We'll have plenty of time for that sort of amusement on some future day," said Harry, who never wasted valuable time in "chin-music." "Just now it will stand us in hand, I fancy, to send out parties to look the old fellow up. Perhaps he's innocent enough."

This was acted upon, and indeed, Old Hard Head was found in no worse employment than quietly looking after his traps.

It must be confessed that his reception of the new-comers was rather churlish.

"Come to stay, I reckon?" he growled. "I'll hev to pull up stakes, an' make tracks fur parts unknown. Dash 'em!"

Even when he learned their business he was scarcely more gracious.

"Thar hain't been nobody around hyar," he said. "Ef he's got the gal he wants, I reckon he ain't goin' to wait fur no relations."

"He may have gone directly to the Kioway village," suggested Harry. "Can you guide us there, and use your influence with Red Wolf to give him up to us if we find him?"

"Yes! let me clap 'ands honto 'im!" cried the ranchero, crooking his fingers like claws, as if to tear his enemy.

Old Hard Head turned his eyes from the discreet son to the more outspoken father, and said, with a cool deliberateness that had a touch of contempt in it:

"Waal, strangers, meanin' no offense to you, Ole Hard Head hain't turned man-hunter yet! I allow that thar's worse things that the young spark, whoever he is, could 'a' done than make off with a gal that he wanted, ef she wanted him jest as bad. No, gents; I allow you'll hev to fotch down yer own badger, the best way ye kin. Thar's enough o' ye, the Lord knows!"

And he glanced about on the little army of vaqueros.

"Was he sich an onery cuss, that it takes enough to garrison a fort to run him down?" he asked.

"See, 'ere, pal!" cried Mr. Oliphant, anger often betraying him into the use of old familiar expressions, "if you don't want to stand in with us, you'll at least find that it breaks no bones to keep a civil tongue in your 'ead!"

Old Hard Head chuckled softly to himself.

"Waal, now," he said, "I reckon I could clean out about three or four sich crowds as youn."

"Carajo!" growled a Mexican, glowering beneath his sombrero.

"Seclerat!" hissed a little Frenchman, from his wilderness of mustaches.

"Bod luck till the thafe o' the wurrold!"

blurted an Irish cowboy, more openly than the others.

Old Hard Head, with his back to a rock, coolly drew the stock of his long rifle up under his arm. The old man was as "gritty" as a wildcat. He didn't cotton to his guests, "no way ye kin fix it." He didn't like their looks, and he didn't like their errand, and he felt full of fight "chuck up to the bung." He never gave a thought to the probable consequences to himself. He believed he could "lay out" half-a-dozen, at least.

But Harry Oliphant never allowed himself to be diverted from a purpose by passion.

"Accomplish your end, and then have your side fights out afterward," was his motto.

"Hold on here!" cried he, repressing his men.

"We didn't come here to pick a senseless quarrel with a stranger. Come! we've no time to waste. We want the shortest route to Red—"

"Hallo! who's this? To cover! to cover! It may be our man!"

In a twinkling the men leaped out of view behind rocks and bushes, leaving Old Hard Head standing alone.

But the new-comer was none other than Don Gonzales; and they gathered about him with eager questionings.

"Senor!" he cried, "you have been on the wrong track. I have seen *ze* *senorita* in *ze* hands of not *ze* Englishman, but of an Indian. She is now in *ze* Indian village."

And he rapidly gave an account of his experience since parting with them.

Hank Oliphant's gratitude for the recovery of his daughter was disposed of in a few mechanical words; but when he came to swear over the prospect of losing his revenge on Sir Walter, he was truly eloquent.

In private consultation with his hopeful son and Don Gonzales, he said:—

"Blast my heyes! but this 'ere won't do! The girl we can get at any time. It's *his* lordship that'll play 'off with us, if 'e slips through our fingers!"

The sun had already dipped behind the western peaks when Santa Fe Bob found his friends; and though they made all speed, it was dark long before they reached the vicinity of the Kioway village.

"It won't do to enter in the night, or there will be bloodshed," suggested Harry; "besides the greater chances of their making way with Ollie in the darkness. Remember, she is as important to us, as is Annesley. Let us surround the village, so that no one can go out, and enter boldly in the morning."

This was acted upon, and the vaqueros were stationed at intervals so as to guard every avenue of approach or exit.

But about midnight the deep silence was broken by sounds of a struggle. An Indian approaching the village had stumbled upon some of the besiegers, so that it was necessary to capture him to prevent him from betraying them.

The prisoner was the Rattlesnake!

CHAPTER XXXII. A RUTHLESS MASSACRE.

RATTLESNAKE had set out with the war-party in apparent good faith; but his heart was hot with a malicious purpose that had been gathering force ever since the tide of fortune seemed to set in favor of his rival. Even superstitious awe was not sufficient to curb his rioting passions. The bitterness of his humiliation had made him reckless almost to the point of madness.

"Yield like a whipped cur to one who has so dragged my pride in the mire? Never!" he cried, within the darkened chambers of his soul.

"The Rattlesnake will outwit even great Red Wolf. Then let the Manitou strike!—it is no shame to fall beneath His blow. To snatch her from this favorite of the god, if to hold her but a day, will be a triumph such as no other Indian can ever boast. In the days to come, the name of the Rattlesnake will be whispered with fear and trembling by braves who scarce think of his bold deed of rebellion against the Manitou!"

Thus he fanned his savage ambition, until death lost its terrors.

As he gazed at Whirlwind, whose animation seemed to inspire the whole band, he chuckled to himself:—

"How poor a revenge, to strike him with death. No; let him live, to know that I am forever beyond his reach. Only the arm of the Manitou could strike Rattlesnake!"

Red Wolf, partaking of Whirlwind's eagerness, had ordered a forced march. His warriors would be all night in the saddle, rest an hour or two in the morning, and then on again.

In the darkness Rattlesnake let his horse fall into the rear; and finally stopping, dismounting and forcing his horse to lie down, a maneuver which took but a moment, he had the satisfaction of seeing his late comrades swap on without him, unconscious of their loss.

Rising, he shook his fist at the darkness by which they had been swallowed up.

"Take the undying hate of Rattlesnake, proud sagamore of the Kioways!" he cried.

"You have driven him into rebellion against

the Deity! But your lying tongue will bring woe upon you and yours! The Manitou forgives only at the cost of blood!"

"And now for the sweetest triumph ever deigned to mortal! Prepare to bend thy spirit to the will of the Rattlesnake, haughty princess! Away, now!"

The last words were addressed to his horse; and frowning like an evil spirit, he sped through the night on his mission of darkness.

Leaving his horse, as he drew near the village, he crept forward with the stealth of a robber.

What words can describe his emotion, when he felt himself suddenly clutched in an embrace like the hug of a grizzly bear?

He was fully prepared for some supernatural intervention; so, like one paralyzed, he yielded without a struggle, and before he discovered that he was in the hands of white men, hence mortals, and having no relation to his affair with the Manitou, Red Wolf & Co., he was securely bound and gagged.

His rage then was impotent.

But Hank Oliphant was impatient to learn whether anything had been seen of the man of whom he was in pursuit.

A piece of phosphorescent wood served as a sort of dark-lantern, to cast its ghastly illumination over Rattlesnake's face, and show him the determined faces of his captors.

"Look at 'ere, Hinjun!" said the ranchero, "do ye hunderstand this lingo?"

And he pressed the cold muzzle of his revolver against Rattlesnake's temple.

"Now listen to w'at I say. We're goin' to huntie your jaw; but if you make a row, I'll put a sudden quietus on you!"

Rattlesnake made signs that he was amicably disposed, and the gag was removed.

All this time Waving Plume was hidden in the hollow tree, just without the circle of the men who stood round her persecutor. Every word spoken by either party was perfectly intelligible to her.

"Now mind yer eye!" began Hank Oliphant, who loved to bully, like the essential coward that he was.

"You need not fear that I will cause any disturbance to betray you," said Rattlesnake, speaking, of course, in Kioway. "Is there any one who understands my language? If so, I may make you see that I am more disposed to form an alliance with you against Red Wolf, than prove hostile to you."

"Arry, you'll 'ave to unsnarl this 'odge-podge," said his father. "'Ang the blasted fools! W'y couldn't heverybody be made to talk Henglish instead of this bloody mess that nobody can hunderstand?"

"Who are you? Why do you wish to betray your chief?" asked Harry.

"I am a great brave, Rattlesnake?" replied that worthy.

Then he told of his grievance, in that Red Wolf had broken his pledge.

"I know who you are, and why you are here," he went on; "but you will not find the Kioway sagamore in his village. He and all his young men are on the prairie. I left them to come and take what was mine by right. Release me, let me take Waving Plume away unmolested, and I will tell you that which you would give your right hand to know."

"That my sister is a prisoner in your village? We know that already," said Harry, who never made concessions except for some real advantage.

"You are mistaken," said Rattlesnake. "Nothing will reward your search of the village. Is Red Wolf so wanting in cunning as to go away and leave his prisoner unguarded? He knew that you were in the pass. He maneuvered to avoid you in going out of it."

"Then you know where the girl is secreted?"

"Yes."

"Tell us at once, or I'll blow the top off your head!" cried Hank Oliphant.

Rattlesnake understood enough of English to get the drift of this.

He smiled quietly, and shook his head.

"Injun worth more to white man dead than alive," he said, significantly. "Shall it be so?" he continued, again addressing Harry in Kioway.

"Shall Rattlesnake have Waving Plume for his own? Do not waste precious time. I will tell you another secret, upon learning which you will not leave the Kioway village until it is in ashes and its squaws and papposes dead or flying in the woods."

"You're a devil of the first water, and no mistake," said Harry. "But it shall be as you wish. What is a squaw to us?"

"Then know that Red Wolf, under the guidance of Whirlwind, is on his way to burn the ranch of Hank Oliphant, and to run off all his cattle and horses!"

The ranchero and his party were thunder-struck at this announcement.

Harry, struck with sudden conviction of the truth of what Rattlesnake had told him, was for dropping everything else, and setting out in hot pursuit of the depredator.

But his father, in a perfect hurricane of profanity, declared his intention of striking a retaliation blow.

"If we lose the chance, and are too late to save our hown bacon, the devil will get hoff scot-free!" he cried.

Rattlesnake was released, and an immediate assault was made on the defenseless village.

There was scarce a man in Hank Oliphant's force who had not at one time or another suffered from the Indians, either the loss of friends or relatives; and many of them now looked forward to a scene of horror when he should return to the desolated ranch. So a kind of frenzy took possession of them; and they determined to avenge in advance the blow that awaited them through their dear ones.

Into the village they dashed with demoniac yells. As if by magic a score of brands blazed out on the night, scattering conflagration right and left, as the incendiaries rushed from teepee to teepee, igniting the inflammable material of which they were constructed.

Shrieks of terror and agony rose to the night heavens, blending with the rattle of fire-arms.

Squaws rushed from their burning lodges, to be shot down with their papposes in their arms. Some cowered to the ground, trying to protect their children with their bodies.

The old men died like Romans. Many a stripling proved that he had the blood of a hero in his veins, selling his life as dearly as might be, while he sought to protect a helpless mother.

And the carnage was lighted by the livid flames that were soon to leave nothing but ashes where an hour ago was life and happiness.

In the midst of the massacre Rattlesnake came face to face with Wa-wa-kee-to.

The old secess sat in her lodge, grim and silent as a statue of stone. Rattlesnake rushed in upon her in his quest of Waving Plume.

But another was there before him, a Mexican, with a blood-reeking tomahawk which he had picked up, and the horrible execution of which satisfied his blood-thirstiness more fully than did the less cruel revolver.

He would have brained the old prophetess on the spot, but Rattlesnake restrained his arm.

"Would you bring down the lightnings of heaven upon us?" he said. "It is Wa-wa-kee-to, the great medicine-woman of the Kioways. See! she is talking to the Manitou!"

The Mexican crossed himself with a shudder. He felt that he had narrowly escaped a sacrilege.

So they withdrew, the squaw never having deigned to look up at them.

Harry Oliphant was already calling off his men. He was anxious to get at Sir Walter Annesley.

"Hang this tomfoolery!" he had said, to himself, while forced to yield to his father's thirst for revenge. "Of what consequence to us is a lot of squaws and children? Annesley's our game, and I'll bet you he slips through our fingers while we are wasting time here."

The last torch was thrown into the medicine-lodge. Then the destroyers swept away into the night, led by Rattlesnake, who was secretly raging at his disappointment in not finding Waving Plume.

Hank Oliphant kept close beside him, having noticed his disturbance of mind.

"Blast yer heyes," was his admonition; "if you play us hany of your tricks, I'll slit yer throat!"

And with this prospect before him, if he failed to make good his promise, Rattlesnake went on to—

Let us see what.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ESCAPE.

IMPRISONMENT, shared with the loved one, has its thrills of delicious pain.

Ollie Oliphant was where she could look upon—almost touch—the man who had completely mastered her maiden fancy. She saw a new expression in his eyes as they rested upon her.

Her voice had been an "open sesame" to his heart. With a rush of feeling, before they had been many minutes together, he had told her his love.

What was his dismay, when with a deadly pallor she stammered:

"You must not—you must not speak to me so."

"Must not tell you of my love?" he cried—"I who have been so blind, until now it is too late—"

"I cannot—I must not listen to you," she interrupted him.

And then close upon her words came a rush of tears.

"Olivia!" he said—it was the first time he had so addressed her—"as greatly as I am to blame for not reading my heart sooner, my love gives me the right to ask some explanation before I accept your answer as final. What do you mean by saying that you 'must not' listen to me? Does some prior engage—"

"Oh, no! no!" she interrupted, as if the thought were a sacrilege.

"Then what is the meaning of your extreme emotion?" he asked, his voice trembling with eagerness. "It cannot be mere pity for the pain you are causing me. Listen to me. These

may be our last moments on earth together. If you love me, are you prepared to imberber them for yourself as well as me, by denying that love? What scruples can justify such a course?

"Ollie!" and his voice melted with tenderness, "I adjure you!—do you, or do you not love me?"

She could not withstand his solemn appeal. Her whole heart rose up to respond, bursting the restraints she had put upon it.

"I do! I do!" she cried, trying to extend her arms to him.

"Thank God!" he responded with deep fervor. "Now I shall live, I know! Some way will be opened, that such a love may not fail of its fulfillment."

"Oh! you must not think of that," she cried hastily. "Nothing can come of my weakness. It is wicked to yield to it a moment. You must not look to anything in the future. It was only knowing our hopeless captivity that induced me to—let you know—"

And then she broke down in sobs.

"Ollie," he replied, with a joyous confidence, that filled her with hope in spite of herself, "I cannot conceive what your scruples are. But it is enough to know that no other tie stands between us. You have avowed that, and for the rest, when it comes time to judge of your motives, I shall assume the right to pass upon them myself. For the present, I must search out some means of escape."

She could not oppose him longer. So she sobbed softly in silence.

Annesley first assured himself that it was impossible to free himself from his bonds without assistance. Then he spoke to his guards, who sat like a couple of pagan idols, browned with smoke and age.

"Can either of you fellows speak English?" he asked.

"What want?" demanded the younger one, gruffly.

"That's to the point," replied Annesley. "The lady wants a drink of water."

The savage looked at Ollie, grunted, and then deliberately got up, and started toward a little brook that trickled at a little distance from the cavernous chamber in which they were confined, to get the water in a hollowed leaf.

Annesley hastily spoke to the other:

"Do you speak English, too?"

The noble red-man looked at him blankly, then shook his head with a grunt which made his lack of comprehension plain enough.

"Good!" said Annesley. "That simplifies the matter. But let me make provision against the chance of failure to bribe our linguist. We may want to converse so that he cannot understand us. Ollie, did you ever practice that absurd child's patois called 'hog Latin'?"

"Oh, yes!" she replied. "Every child has mastered that, I fancy."

"No doubt. But here comes the water. Drink it whether you are thirsty or not."

She did as directed, thanking her savage Mercury very sweetly.

Then Annesley began.

"My friend," he asked, "does this Indian speak English?"

"No spick!" replied he addressed.

"Very good. I want to make you an offer which it may be as well for him not to understand. You like fire-water?"

The savage's eyes glistened. However his only reply was a cautious:—

"Ugh!"

"You like horses?" continued Annesley.

"Much good," admitted Mr. Lo.

"And guns?"

"Good!"

"And knives, and medals, and blankets, and calico?"

"All good!"

"If the Indian had more knives, and blankets, and guns than any chief; if he had horses more than he could ride from moon to moon; if he had fire-water every day—would his heart be glad?"

Another deep grunt, as if all these things were too impossible to be thought about, except as a tantalization.

"See here," said Annesley in a business-like way, "you know that the mules you got the other day from the Sioux were by them taken from me. Only a rich man could have so many things. Well, I am a rich man; I am a great chief in my country. I could give a mule like those to every one in your tribe, and yet not miss the things from all that I have. Now, if you will let this lady and me escape, I will make you a great chief; I will give you a horse for every day from moon to moon—*thirty*!—do you understand?"

And he held up his fingers three times.

And this is what he got for his pains: the noble red-man gazed at him a moment then turned sullenly away, with a lift of the shoulders, and a single word in comment:

"Lie!"

To be called a liar or coward is trying to ones nerves under any circumstances; to be subjected to such an insult in the presence of the woman one loves, and to be helpless to resent it is to be scourged with nettles. And yet there was a comical side to the Indian's incre-

dulity. Annesley flushed scarlet, at the same time that he laughed—rather mechanically, it must be confessed!

But it was plain that in his eagerness, he had overshot the mark. He could not bribe that Indian with promises.

"We have but one hope left," he said to Ollie, speaking in the "hog Latin" he had proposed. "When darkness comes on, and sleepiness makes our guards less vigilant, we must try to roll near enough together so that, by lying back to back, I can get at your bonds and loosen them. Then by doing the same service for me, you may enable me to make a dash at these fellows, and make one try, at least, for liberty. It is rather a forlorn hope, to be frank about it; but it is our only one, so far as I can see."

But when night came, the savage who could not understand English lay down between the lovers, while the other kept watch.

The situation seemed hopeless.

Ollie despaired utterly.

But, close upon midnight, there came the sound of hurrying feet; and a low voice cried in Kioway:

"Fear not—it is I, Waving Plume!"

The moment the ranchero and his men started for the village, on their mission of destruction, the girl slipped from her place of concealment in the hollow tree, and ran with the fleetness of a deer, to carry out her scheme.

The Indians sprung to their arms, as she burst in upon them; but her breathless excitement scattered their prudence, as she intended it should.

"Come! come!" she cried, catching hold of them, and dragging them out of the cave.

"The village has been attacked! Look! listen! Do you not see the glare of the conflagration on the clouds?—do you not hear the reports of firearms? Your squaw and papposes, Little Cliff, and, Crow's-bill, your old mother, are being murdered. Strain your ears and you can hear their shrieks. Away! away! cannot you strike a blow in their defense? Or let one of you go to recall Red Wolf. Ah! he will find his village in ashes, his people food for the coyotes and buzzards! Away! away! not a moment is to be lost! It is already too late! Little Cliff, your boy fought bravely; but I fear he has gone down to death!"

Where she pointed the sky was indeed red with the glow of blazing tepees, and faintly came the sound of strife.

The Indians forgot their charge and dashed away, to the rescue, if might be, of their loved ones.

Waving Plume re-entered the cave.

"I have come to release you," she said, addressing Annesley, "but on one condition—that you promise to take this squaw and fly with her out of this country, never to return, either of you. Take her beyond the great salt water, to the home you spoke about, where no one can ever find her."

"But, my cousin, you will accompany us?" urged Annesley.

"Never!" cried Waving Plume, vehemently. "Know that I hate you and all of your people. I am not one of them. My heart is all red! I hate this squaw, too. Take her away, or I will leave you here to death!"

She did not tell Annesley that the ranchero would be there presently to rescue him, as she supposed.

"Swear," she cried, "not to take her home to her father's house, but to fly with her out of the country!"

"I readily promise that," said Annesley, "if you will but furnish the means of escape."

Waving Plume could not be too particular. Even if he broke his promise, so she argued, it would not be worse than to leave him there to be rescued by the ranchero. On the other hand, if he kept his word, she would have gained her point.

She might have killed both, as they lay there helpless, and so secured her end beyond peradventure. But, though she had been ready to strike Ollie in a fit of jealousy; now that she was assured on that point, she shrunk from violence as naturally as any one.

Quickly she cut their bonds, and led them forth to where the horses were waiting.

The reaction from despair to hope, and the suspense lest their escape might be frustrated at any moment, made Ollie weak and tremulous, so that Walter had to sustain her. But it goes without telling that this was a delightful task to him.

A moment, as he lifted her to the back of her horse he held her close-pressed in his arms, and kissed her quivering lips.

Then they were away, following Waving Plume's lead.

The girl proved herself no mean guide; and just as the dawn was bursting through the deep darkness of the night, she brought them to the level prairie.

"Go straight on to the south," she directed them, "keeping as close as possible to the foothills. You will not be followed. Remember your promise. Waving Plume has given you your lives on that condition. If you break faith with her, beware of her vengeance!"

Then she stood and watched them sweeping away in the distance.

She became lost in abstraction, from which she was abruptly aroused by a sound just at hand. She turned and stood face to face with Rattlesnake!

He had crept up upon her while she was dreaming. Now, with a look of demoniac exultation on his evil face, he urged his horse to the side of hers, and before she had recovered from her astonishment, before she was aware of his purpose, cast his arms about her.

"Mine!" he cried, "mine, in spite of Red Wolf, Wa-wa-kee-to, and even the Manitou himself."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A CHASE FOR LIFE.

RATTLESNAKE, much against his will, was forced to abandon his quest of Waving Plume and guide the ranchero and his party to Annesley's place of concealment.

"The 'and of the devil is hin it!" said Hank Oliphant. "To think as 'ow them two was brought together! But I'll gobble 'im up this time, for sure. And w'en I get through with 'im—good-by!"

So he clung close to Rattlesnake, to prevent him from giving them the slip.

"For the devil's in this w'ole business, and we can't be too careful," said he.

They reached the cave, but at a glance Rattlesnake saw that by some means the prisoners had escaped.

Waving Plume, in her hurry, had not taken precautions to prevent her horses from trampling the bushes; and Rattlesnake knew that the place would never be left in that condition if the prisoners were within.

He feared that in his disappointment the ranchero would hold him responsible, or believe that he had been deceiving him. There was but one chance for his life, then; a bold dash must decide the question one way or the other.

He was carrying his rifle at a trail, in his right hand, and was on the off side of the ranchero. With a quick motion he canted it across his horse's withers, and the weapon exploded.

Hank Oliphant's animal reared, and then lopped over sideways, with a bullet in his brain, carrying his rider to the ground.

All was instant confusion, the others thinking that it was an attack from secret foes, doubtless the guards of the prisoners; and in that moment Rattlesnake took to his heels.

When the ranchero, half-stunned, came to himself, to tell the trick that had been played on him, it was too late to follow the absconded guide.

A slight examination proved, however, that he had been honest in his representations; so that a small party was left to try to trace the fugitives.

Then Hank Oliphant set out to the defense of his ranch.

"We sha'n't be more than an hour or two behind 'em," he said, "and the boys can 'old hout that long at least."

But let the sequel decide that point.

By taking a more direct route, Rattlesnake gained the prairie in advance of the party of whites, and we have seen how he surprised Waving Plume.

But at the very moment of apparent triumph evil often rushes upon its doom!

He clasped to his bosom a girl and a knife!

In an agony of despair and fury Waving Plume had just time to draw the weapon and interpose it between his body and her own.

It stung him like a scorpion. He released her with a cry, then fixed his horrified eyes upon the bloody blade, just visible in the growing light; clutched at his breast; reeled, and fell headlong to the ground, his horse coursing away.

Horried, Waving Plume staid not to look upon the work of her despair, but turned her horse's head toward the distant ranch and gave him the rein.

The deed had been done in self-defense; but that did not lessen its repulsiveness, though it relieved her conscience from any sense of guilt.

Out over the prairie she urged her horse, feeling that she had not a moment to spare—as indeed the event proved.

Shortly after noon, while clearing a swell on the prairie, she looked back, and far on the horizon discovered a party of horsemen.

"It is the white men," she cried; "they are on my trail! If they overtake me before I reach my own people, all my struggles will be in vain. Bear up, Ke-wa-ka!" to her pony. "If I put too severe a tax upon you now, it is only because my very life and liberty are at stake."

Hour after hour she toiled, and every time she saw the party in her rear they were nearer. They had discovered her at the same time that she first saw them, and were urging the pursuit at the top of their speed. But their horses, properly much fleetlier than her pony, were exhausted, having had no chance to rest since they came over very nearly this same route two days before.

When the sun sunk in the west she could hear

their cries, faint with distance, as she saw them glorified with the effulgence of light.

The quick darkness of the plains succeeded, and not two hours afterward a glow rose in the east. Its nature was unmistakable.

"The ranch is in flames!" cried Waving Plume.

Hank Oliphant and his men saw it, too, and amid wild imprecations, lashed their jaded horses into renewed fleetness.

Nearer and nearer they drew, gaining upon the flying pony. With diabolical hatred, Hank Oliphant thought that it would be some satisfaction to wreak his vengeance on this one of the hated race.

Nearer and nearer! By the light of the blazing corrals she was plainly in view.

But now her pony seemed to pick up new life. He held his own. On! on! until with the yelling vaqueros almost at her very heels, she reached the open gate of the ranch.

Within was such a scene as only the border ever witnesses—blazing houses, and massacred men, women, and children!

But at the moment she entered the gate, her heart was pierced by a sight that seemed as if it must rob her of her life. Coming out as she went in appeared a riderless steed—a milk-white mare!

CHAPTER XXXV.

A HAPPY DISCOVERY.

MEANWHILE, the lovers sped on their way unmolested.

What more is there to tell of them? Of course, ably seconded by the girl's heart, Walter had no difficulty in overcoming Ollie's scruples. Not that she avowedly gave up the struggle; but he silenced her with endearing epithets and caresses, and she was glad to be still.

Fortune favored them, too, for they fell in with a party of emigrants, the sight of whose white-tiled wagons was refreshing, you may well believe!

Their welcome was a hearty one, and when Annesley had told his story, the captain of the wagon-train said:

"Waal, stranger, you've had a hard row to hoe, an' that's a fact. And now, ef you'll believe me, I'll bet high that we've got one o' your cusses with us; and it's in mighty bad shape he is, too!"

"Eh?" asked Annesley. "Whom can you have in any way connected with me?"

"Waal," replied Captain Cobb, "a couple of our hunters found a man on the prairie, e'en a'most chewed up by the coyotes. He tells a mighty ugly story o' how he was deserted by one o' his pals; an' only wants to live to git squar' with him."

Thereupon Annesley was led into the presence of no less a person than Sam, the Sockdoliger!

He was a "sight to behold." How life remained in his body was a marvel.

"Waal, Cap," he said to Annesley, "ef I pull through with this, I won't make a very handsome subject fur the hangman—eh? I suppose, now, you'll do your level best to swing me, fur the little game I tried to come on you. But see hvar, Cap, maybe I kin strike a bargain with ye. Ef you'll let up on me—I swear I only want to live so as to come back at Santa Fe Bob—ef you'll let up on me, I'll tell ye a secret that's worth somethin' to ye."

"What secret can you tell me?" asked Annesley.

"Oh, show, now! biz is biz! Is it a go? I don't wag my jaws fur nothin', you bet!"

"Go ahead," said Annesley. "If your secret is any thing of importance to me, I promise not to urge any thing against you for the past."

Then for the first time, he learned the plot against him, and the fact that Ollie was his cousin!

He hastened to tell her, and that furnished the cue to a score of things that had puzzled her all her life. That accounted for Mrs. Oliphant's remorseful and really servile love, and the fact that Ollie had never felt toward the ranchero or his wife the love she felt she ought to entertain for her parents.

We pass over her emotions at learning her new position in life. All her scruples were now swept away. She could give herself to her cousin without reserve. Ah! delightful thought—she was no longer the daughter of a murderer!

She wept her happiness in her lover's arms.

"And now all we want is Mrs. Guppy, *alias* Oliphant," said Annesley. "Captain Cobb, haven't you enough stout fellows to risk going to the ranch and straightening this matter up?"

"Waal, I reckon I have, by thunder—eh, boys?"

A yell of assent indicated the "boys'" enthusiastic approval of this scheme; and the course of the wagon-train was turned toward the ranch.

As they approached the spot they found only a mass of smoldering ruins.

Ollie was greatly shocked, and her grief for her foster-mother was genuine.

To spare her, Walter made her stay with the wagon-train, at some distance, while he went

forward with a party of the train men. He did not wish her to be shocked by the sight of the mutilated wretches that he knew would be found among yonder ruins.

But there he made a discovery as unexpected as it was fortunate. In the prairie grass, at some distance from the ranch, Mrs. Oliphant was found, in a swoon from exhaustion and fright, but not otherwise harmed.

Soon Ollie's arms were about the faithful creature.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE END OF ALL.

AND now, let us give our last scene to the real hero and heroine of our story.

Under the lead of Whirlwind, the Indians reached the ranch just after dark. Knowing that they had no time to waste, they attacked at once.

But the few ranchmen who were left defended the place gallantly; and it is impossible to tell what might have been the issue but for an unforeseen event.

Again and again the savages rushed to the attack, only to be repulsed by a scorching fire. But when they were almost ready to despair, and Red Wolf was in a towering rage, while Whirlwind began to fear that his brightly opening career was about to suffer a reverse, the great gate of the ranch swung wide open, and an Indian girl rushed forth. It was Tita; and this was her revenge for the murder of her lover, Patricio! She had betrayed the ranch to the enemy.

The Indians did not stop to learn what all this meant. They saw the gate open, and knew that for some reason this girl, apparently of their race, at least in part, had admitted them. Rushing past her, they entered.

Then came a scene that beggars description. None of the horrors of Indian warfare were forgotten. The air resounded with the yells of the victors, the shrieks of the dying; the bellowings of frightened cattle drowning all else in its horrid din; while all was lighted by the lurid glare of conflagration.

A faithful servant assisted Mrs. Oliphant to escape, by going to the roof of the house and dropping to the ground on the outside. Thence she ran and hid in the prairie grass, to be found on the morrow as we have described.

Meanwhile the corrals were burst open, and the cattle poured out upon the prairie to rush away in a general stampede, while still the fighting and burning went on.

In the melee, Whirlwind was shot from his horse, no one heeding him as he fell.

At that moment the horses began to pour from the stables.

The mare was in their van; but as she was passing through the gateway, her bridle-rein was caught by Waving Plume.

A moment later the active girl had left her pony for the back of her lover's steed, while the horses from the ranch stable poured about her, nearly bearing her away in the throng.

But she mastered the mare and returned to the ranch yard, to the amazement of old Red Wolf.

Hastily she told him what had happened, and that the vaqueros were just at hand.

Like wildfire the news spread among the savages; and with yells of vengeful hatred they rushed forth to meet the new foe.

A terrible battle ensued just without the blazing ranch.

Meanwhile, Waving Plume searched for her lover. She found him at last, and the grief with which she cast herself upon his body was terrible to witness.

Wild cries issued from her lips as she strained him to her heart. All her savage nature was aroused. She was a veritable tigress in her love.

And in the midst of this demonstration Whirlwind awoke to renewed consciousness.

Words cannot describe the emotions of the girl at this restoration. She laughed over him; she cried over him; she rocked him on her breast as though he had been a child; and all the while she poured her love over him in a perfect flood of tender words.

It was her Spanish blood talking now. All her Indian training went to the wall before her great love!

And he?—well, it is safe to say, from what we know of him—for a brave warrior is ever a gallant lover—that he repaid her kiss for kiss; and did not let her have more than a woman's share of the talk either!

Then exerting her great strength—great for a woman—she actually lifted the wounded youth to the back of his mare, and mounting behind him, held him in her arms.

Away from the ranch, out over the prairie they went, leaving the fighting far behind. What was fighting to them, when they had their love? What mattered it that in Hank Oliphant's utter rout Tita's revenge was complete?

Let the ranchero, a ruined man, his plot blown to the winds, gnash his teeth and scheme for some way to retrieve the blow fortune has dealt him.

As for Harry, he has need for all his philosophy; but let Santa Fe Bob look out for himself—if Sam the Sockdoliger recovers, he will have on his track a man with a deathless hate to sate!

Red Wolf, enriched by as many cattle and horses as his heart could desire, stands beside the ruins of his desolated village. He frowns upon Wa-wa-kee-to, who is among those so fortunate as to escape that terrible massacre; and deep in his throat he mutters:

"The chief, listening to lying counsels and his own deceitful heart, broke his word! The Manitou never forgives!"

But unmindful of all this, Waving Plume bore her lover over the prairie.

When he was conscious he smiled in her face and feebly returned her burning kisses. But there were times when pain wrung the color from his lips, and he lay on her breast in a swoon. Then she layed his face with her tears, alternately praying to her gods in moaning cadences, and crying out to them in fierce protest.

So she reached the dug-out, whence the dog and bears rushed out in boisterous welcome, while Old Hard Head appeared on the threshold shaking his band and smiling his rare smile.

But when he saw the boy lying like one dead in the arms of his amazonian sweetheart, he uttered a cry that died away in a moan, and staggered against the door-frame.

While he was yet making a groping motion with his hands, and two great tears coursed down his weather-beaten cheeks, Waving Plume leaped from the mare's back, lifted her helpless lover in her arms and placed him at the old man's feet, crying:

"Great Medicine of the white man, heal him by thy art!"

Still in that blind way, and murmuring "Dead, dead! Oh, boy!" the old trapper knelt down beside one he loved as his own.

Then Whirlwind opened his eyes, feeling his faithful dog lick his cheek, whimpering the while in canine sympathy. Feebly he smiled, and reaching out one hand to the old man, while he held fast to Waving Plume with the other, he said:

"Have I dishonored your training? See! I have many scalps, the fleetest mare on the prairie, and, to sit in my wigwam, the most beautiful squaw that gladdens the morning with her smile. We'll have her in the dug-out, old man, only not your way of going about it."

And while the dog frisked and barked, knowing that all was right, and the bears set to dancing, doubtless out of sympathy with the joy of their canine companion, and Old Hickory wagged his long ears, calmly indifferent to the milk-white mare's disdain, and Waving Plume blushed and smiled divinely, Old Hard Head said:

"Thank God, boy, we've got you back safe and sound!"

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